REVEALED! **VIRTUA FIGHTER 4** AND **CRAZY TAXI 2**

Lifecycle 2 Vol3 #5 05/01

Next Generation Magazine

NextGen

WORLD EXCLUSIVE

HALO

CAN BUNGIE'S WAR MACHINE LEAD XBOX TO VICTORY?

TROUBLE IN MARIO WORLD

Nintendo's top GameCube developer in turmoil

Plus:

- 11 new Xbox titles
- GeForce3's stunning graphics
- New games for Vectrex, Atari 2600, ColecoVision

Reviewed:

Conker's Bad Fur Day, Fear Effect 2, Paper Mario, Shadow of Destiny, Clive Barker's Undying

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It Takes Heart To Play!
Do You Have One?
ILLBLEED

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Bungie spent over two years working to make **Halo** the best-looking game ever — then the developer threw away its graphics engine. With only seven months left before launch, can this game become the signature **Xbox** launch title **Microsoft** needs it to be?

HOLY HALO

It is going to be one hell of a race against the clock to get this game done in time

And six more Xbox launch games from Microsoft... beginning on page 65

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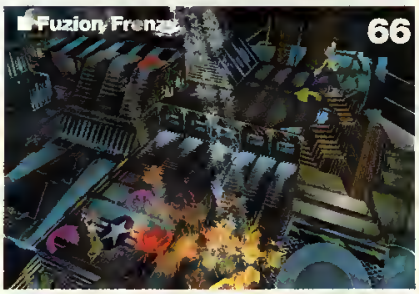
Azurik 66



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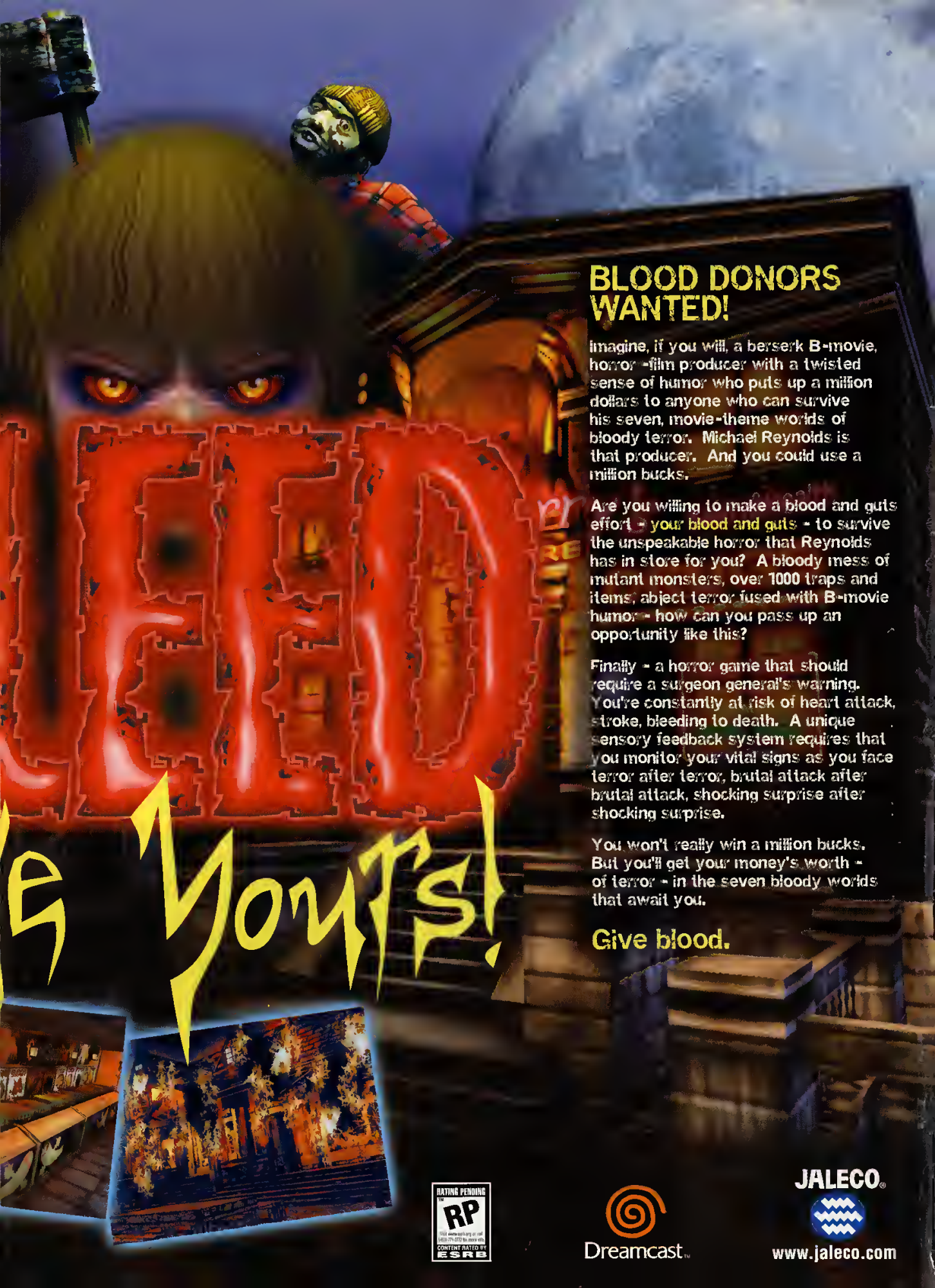
BLOOD DONORS WANTED!
Imagine, if you will, a berserk B-movie, horror-film producer with a twisted sense of humor who puts up a million dollars to anyone who can survive his seven, movie-theme worlds of bloody terror. Michael Reynolds is that producer. And you could use a million bucks.
Are you willing to make a blood and guts effort - your blood and guts - to survive the unspeakable horror that Reynolds has in store for you? A bloody mess of mutant monsters, over 1000 traps and items, abject terror fused with B-movie humor - how can you pass up an opportunity like this?
Finally - a horror game that should require a surgeon general's warning. You're constantly at risk of heart attack, stroke, bleeding to death. A unique sensory feedback system requires that you monitor your vital signs as you face terror after terror, brutal attack after brutal attack, shocking surprise after shocking surprise.
You won't really win a million bucks. But you'll get your money's worth - of terror - in the seven bloody worlds that await you.
Give blood.
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Dreamcast.
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Believe it or not, this is a new game! This screenshot is taken from *Wormhole*, an upcoming Vectrex game created by John Dondzila, who makes new games for classic systems

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NOUVEAU CLASSIC GAMING

OLD SYSTEM, NEW GAMES

Dust off your old controllers — developers are making new games for Atari 2600, Vectrex, ColecoVision, and more

A programmer sits hunched over a keyboard, working late into the night and on weekends to finish a new game. After countless hours of fixing and debugging, the game is finally published and released to an excited public that immediately eats it up. It's the same old story that's been told thousands of times, right? Wrong. Because this particular game was developed for the Vectrex, and it shipped a full 12 years after the last Vectrex game was made. Retro-revivalists are making new games for old systems, but who are they, and why do they do it?

Blame The Internet

When the Internet exploded in the '90s, people who knew a little about classic systems began sharing their data by posting it on free web sites. Soon enough, the required information was available for diehards looking to create new content on systems from the age of Atari. This is how John Dondzila, viewed by many classic cultists as the Miyamoto of "old" systems, got started in 1995. Dondzila has created five new games for Vectrex, two for ColecoVision, and even a title for the Odyssey 2. Using a $20 Vectrex he stumbled upon at a flea market along with an Erasable Programmable ROM (EPROM) emulator, a cross-compiler, and a PC, he designed Vector Vaders, the first new Vectrex game since 1982.

"Vectrex has a serious cult following, and I feel always wanted one," explains Dondzila. "Unfortunately, it came out around the videogame industry crash of the early '80s and was pricey at $199."

Dondzila's new games are available on his web site as bits that can run on a Vectrex emulator. His site is not the only one either — if you know where

"Playing the games on an emulator just isn't the same as playing them on the original console."

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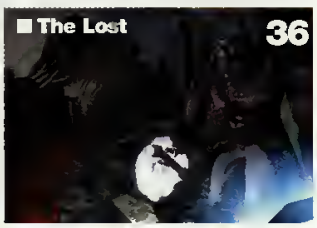

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Cover Story

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Old Systems, New Games

Think Atari 2600 or ColecoVision are long dead? Think again. There are new titles to be had 68

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Separating the wheat from the chaff for over six years

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■ EDITORIAL

The Broadband Fairy Tale

The only online gaming console you'll see this year has just ceased production. That is, of course, Dreamcast. And while you may see new systems this year from Microsoft and Nintendo, and maybe more than a few good games for PS2, don't expect any of the broadband networks for these consoles to be in place until at least 2002 — late 2002.

Blame Sony and Microsoft for over-promising in this department, because both did. But we can't call them outright liars. Broadband connections remain expensive and elusive, so the slower-than-projected nationwide adoption rate of broadband has made such networks less than viable for now. In fact, I'm so confident that none of these companies will have their broadband networks available to consumers by the end of the year, I'll eat my left shoe live via webcast if one manages to.

But a lack of broadband console networks isn't such a bad thing. There's still plenty to play online with a PC or Dreamcast. And right now, Nintendo, Microsoft, and Sony are concentrating on creating the best system-selling games they can. In fact, many developers are just beginning to really tap into the power of the new systems, and we've got an incredible-looking magazine this month to prove it. Just take a look — even the staff cynics were impressed.

Tom

— Tom Russo

News

Game industry news and analysis

■ This benchmark demo from MadOnion uses Finnish developer Remedy's *Max Payne* engine to faithfully re-create the lobby scene from *The Matrix* in realtime — that's right, we said *realtime*

■ BREAKING THE PRE-RENDERED BARRIER

Realtime Graphics Go Big Time

Nvidia's GeForce3 chipset redefines the future of in-game graphics

It wasn't that long ago when we [illegible] sat in front of games like *Tekken* and *Panzer Dragoon*, and, watching their beautiful pre-rendered intros, pondered the question, "When are we going to play games that look like *that*?"

That question was answered on Feb. 26, when Nvidia revealed the GeForce3 chipset — the first fully programmable graphics processor. With its 57 million transistors offering an unprecedented level of performance, the chip makes the kind of CG graphics that were once reserved for pre-rendered movies available to game developers for use in realtime scenarios.

"It's been a huge investment for us," says Nvidia CEO Jen-Hsun Huang, "both in architecture and hardware design, and software [illegible] I wouldn't be surprised if it's near [illegible] to 1,000 m[illegible] years."

As you can see by the screenshots, the GeForce [illegible] has enabled [illegible] create [illegible]ics that [illegible] only feature [illegible] high-polygon objects,

■ A vertex shader was used to create this laser effect in *Independence War 2* (above). In *Ballistics* (left), a futuristic racing game, per-pixel lighting is used to bump-map the sides of the track, and pixel shaders are used to generate the frosted glass effect on the tube

but numerous other graphical effects to create more realistic worlds. What differentiates the NV20 from past chipsets is that it's a fully programmable GPU. All the traditional ways of transforming, lighting, and rendering are still handled by the chipset, but game programmers can also use the nfiniteFX engine to program their own methods of handling these operations. What makes this even more unusual is that these user-created routines can then be run directly on the GeForce3, freeing up the CPU to handle other computationally intensive aspects of gameplay, such as physics and AI.

■ Developer Planet Moon has been quietly working on a GeForce3-enhanced version of *Giants*

Two of the chipset's key feature sets include programmable pixel shaders and vertex shaders. Vertex shading enables morphing and material stretching, and procedural deformations such as rippling water or skinning effects for more lifelike character movement. Pixel shaders enable developers to alter the lighting and surface effects on objects on a per-pixel basis. This results in more realistic texturing effects, including bump-mapping, reflective surfaces, and self-shadowing objects. In fact, the NV20 can perform as many as 36 pixel shading operations in parallel. Combining multiple features enables programmers and artists to model realtime hair and fur, materials such as silk and leather, lens effects, weather effects, and perfectly accurate reflections and refractions.

Not only does GeForce3 make such incredibly cool effects possible, it also helps them look their absolute best when they reach the computer screen. The card supports high-resolution anti-aliasing at what Nvidia insists are truly playable framerates; this GPU boasts a fill rate of 3.2 billion anti-aliased samples per second.

It's important to remember this chip is basically the precursor to Xbox's NV2A, and it has been suggested by Nvidia employees that Xbox's NV2A is at least one generation ahead of the NV20. In fact, Nvidia claims that its biggest client for the chips are developers working on Xbox projects. "Because of the pervasiveness of Xbox and the number of content developers all over the world that are signed up," says Huang, "we've never seen this level of adoption in any point in our history." This not surprising, as getting a GeForce3 for your PC is initially going to cost around $500 — a bit higher than most consumers are probably willing to pay for an upgrade. But as the pre-cursor to the Xbox chip, you can bet there will be games to support it. Id's John Carmack took the Mac-compatible GeForce3 to Japan for a Macworld show, where he revealed some sample movies of the technology being used in *Doom 3*. A week later in the U.S., Nvidia had a number of games to show at its GeForce3 unveiling, including footage

■ BITS FROM THE EDGE

News Bytes

What a crazy month. Earthquakes that shook stuff off the walls at Valve Software; the sad, if inevitable end of the *Official Sega Dreamcast* magazine; and the fact no one complained that *Star Wars Starfighter* lacks a map or radar... It's all just had our heads spinning...

But not spinning nearly as much as the crazy events in Japan. Square — you know, Squore — actually lost money in a quarter! (Just to be sure it was the same Square that created *Final Fantasy*, we even checked twice.) 'Scuse us here, but aren't companies who release games that sell like *Final Fantasy* supposed to be making money? Then again, they also made *Driving Emotion Type-S*...

Weirder still, Square actually let Mr. *Final Fantasy* himself, Hironobu Sakaguchi, resign over the losses. For a second we thought the company was going to call in **Next Gen** idol Nasir Gebelli (the reclusive Iranian programmer of *Final Fantasy I*) to replace him. But it turned out to just be some Japanese business face-saving thing, as he's back at Square, firmly in charge of (surprise!) making the next *Final Fantasy*.

Even still more weird were the public statements by Square that the company may consider bringing some *Final Fantasy* games to Game Boy Advance. As in Nintendo's Game Boy Advance. Could a Square/Nintendo reconciliation be in the works?

Not according to Nintendo President Hiroshi Yamauchi, who told a reporter (essentially), "Square can say anything it wants, but Square isn't developing for Game Boy Advance anytime soon." Ouch. And we don't just think he was talking about the long waiting list for dev kits — a wait that's putting the hurt on some publishers in the U.S., who don't

■ One demo featured this chameleon animating in realtime. The chameleon's skin changed many times to show off bump-mapping and even reflective metal

of *Max Payne*, *Aquonox*, *Dronez*, and *Independence War 2*.

But perhaps the best news for gamers and the industry as a whole is that Nvidia isn't alone in pushing the CG envelope. *Virtua Fighter 4* from Sega on Naomi 2 hardware comes to mind, as do Nintendo's brief-but-impressive GameCube demos at last year's Spaceworld. Without question, in-game graphics are soaring to new, unprecedented levels of realism, and competition to be the best-looking game is going to be fierce.

Nvidia isn't showing any signs of slowing down either. The company has made it clear it already has plans to continue working towards its next-generation architecture, the NV30. The NV30 project will include the work of 100 top engineers formerly with 3dfx, which was recently acquired by Nvidia — many of the best minds on the planet in graphics rendering are now all under one roof.

This is because, as good as the current generation is, there's still plenty of room for games to have even more visual impact. "We're still not there," says Tony Tamasi, Nvidia's director of product marketing. "We're still not doing *Toy Story 2* in realtime. We're still not doing photo-quality rendering in realtime, but we're taking a huge step closer." — *Tom Russo*

HARDCORE SACRIFICE

Many moons ago, when PlayStation was still in its prime, my greedy, grasping gamer paws yearned for the extremely sweet-looking *Final Fantasy VII*. But I lacked the green to pay for the ultimate in shrink-wrapped entertainment. My aunt, knowing my dilemma, promised to purchase *FFVII* if I accompanied my younger cousin to a — get this — Backstreet Boys concert! Could I survive such torture? Was a young male adult capable of enduring their mushy harmonies?

Well, a few years later, and a hundred times wiser, I am still breathing, and I am able to recount my tale of grueling sacrifice for an absolutely dreamy game. Be warned: Once you've experienced a Backstreet Boys performance, your life will never be the same again. Their bebop tunes envelop your mind eternally.

Philippe Reiter
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

Do you have a hardcore story? If so, send it to us. If we print it, we'll send you a free **Next Gen** T-shirt. Email your true tales of gaming madness to ngonline@imaginemedia.com. Please use "hardcore" as the subject line.

■ PLAY TWO HOURS OF MARIO KART AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING

Games As Therapy?

New uses for videogames are proving to be the best medicine

■ Therapists often have to make their own games, like this one Do2Learn created to teach autistic children about fire safety

■ Many researches find videogames to be more engaging and helpful than other forms of technology

Paging Senator Lieberman: Videogames and virtual reality technology may be the most exciting and helpful new tool for therapists in the last few years. Research from universities such as Georgia Tech, North Carolina State, and USC have found that game technology can have beneficial effects on patients suffering from autism and psychological trauma, and companies are putting this technique into play.

A leader in the field of therapeutic videogames is Do2Learn, a company founded to implement practical ways for videogames to help children with autism. Because autistic children often have trouble maintaining focus and learning basic life skills, Do2Learn has found that videogames are a great way for children to learn simple rules such as fire and street safety. No, *Paper Mario* and *Onimusho* aren't part of the program, but the simple games used are based on the same interactive principles at the heart of all games. Was Do2Learn President Dorothy Strickland shocked at how quickly autistic children mastered the cause-and-effect concept of a PC mouse by using it to move through a virtual house? "It surprised us completely," says Strickland. "We even had some adult researchers on staff who can't use a mouse well at all, yet we are amazed at how a 4-year-old took to it so quickly."

These basic games and virtual reality machines are helping not only young kids, but also victims of stroke, spinal injuries, and severe phobias. According to Skip Rizzo, a clinical psychologist at USC, what makes virtual reality so useful is its ability to be strictly controlled and monitored, something that is both vital and very difficult to do in a laboratory. Likewise, Larry Hodges, a professor at Georgia Tech, is part of a team that uses virtual reality helmets and game-like graphics to help Vietnam veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder. Hodges uses the technology for a harrowing but controllable re-creation of particular events to help patients confront and conquer their fears. The use of videogames and VR as therapy is still in its infancy and is likely to continue to develop as further research is made in the area. "We think videogames have a real potential to help, and we don't see anything else out there that is quite so encouraging," adds Strickland. — *Jim Preston*

have the machines to test what their developers are developing.

Yamauchi also recently told some reporters he wouldn't be surprised to see the game industry in Japan shrink to just a tenth the size it is today. Given the sales figures in Japan (we hear even Square lost money — uh, but you already knew that), it might not be as insane a prediction as it sounds: Our Japanese sources tell us the industry over there is poised for a major crash, especially since PS2 software just won't sell.

We tried to not talk about hardware this episode, but we can't help ourselves... Sony's "relaunch" should be in full swing by the time you read this, but the way we read the numbers, the company had better hope it sells, oh, say, more than a million units in March if it expects to hit its fiscal year target of 3 million units sold in North America.

And Sony had better hope for a quick DVD driver upgrade if it wants to tone down Microsoft's "We have progressive scan and HDTV support for DVD playback, nyah-nyah-nyah" attack at E3. Of course, you don't have to buy a separate remote to get DVD playback on your PS2 like you do with Xbox.

Last but not least, what's up with the bitter public battle between Nyko (inventor of and vigorous defender of its rights to the Worm Light) and Nuby (creator of the innovative, but possibly also derivative, Cobra Light)? Beats us, but it makes fascinating news. We're also considering strapping on a flak-jacket before venturing down to accessory-packed Kentia Hall at E3. See ya at the show!

— Compiled by Corrie Shepherd, Executive News Editor, DollyRodor.com

■ SHOPPING SPREE

Who's Next?

In the battle to secure cutting-edge games, top developers are being gobbled up by console-making giants

Great games sell systems. Specifically, great exclusive games sell systems. The winner of the Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo war will ultimately be determined by what company has the deepest arsenal of top games, and that begins and ends with development talent. Last March, Sony bought *Syphon Filter*-developer Eidetic. Two months later, Microsoft acquired Bungie, maker of the highly anticipated *Halo*, and then *Stormlancer* creator Digital Anvil in December. Most recently, Sony acquired Naughty Dog, creator of the best-selling *Crash Bandicoot* series, and *NFL GameDay* developer Red Zone in February. Isolated incidents, or the start of a trend?

"It's very important for console manufacturers to have strong internal teams," suggests Insomniac Games President Ted Price, whose company developed the *Spyro* titles for PlayStation. "The more top-flight development teams that you can say are exclusively yours, the more confidence you inspire in the public, and the more you're going to hurt your competitors by taking away their opportunity to work with those teams."

Most gamers can only afford one system, and that system will be the console for which the greatest number of top games are available. Exclusive games have been Nintendo's strategy from the beginning, and it's been successful because Nintendo has some of the best internal developers in the business. "I bought a NES just for *Zelda*, and I'll probably buy a GameCube for the next *Zelda*," admits Surreal Lead Designer Alan Patmore, who's currently working on *Drakon* for PlayStation 2. "Companies have adopted Nintendo's strategy, as you can see in Microsoft buying Bungie and, for all intents and purposes, Oddworld [which signed an exclusive four-game agreement]. Sony didn't do this so much with PlayStation, but now that they've made their mark and

■ *Spyro* developer Insomniac Games fits the acquisition-target profile: good reputation, easy to work with, and not too big

are the dominant player, they need to provide those unique games also."

The Good and the Bad

Just because it's a seller's market doesn't mean every independent developer will soon be absorbed. Take, for example, Insomniac Games, which is a respected studio with a good track record. Although Insomniac's Price doesn't think selling is wrong, he's made it clear to prospective buyers that he has no interest. "Knowing we're in control of our destiny is very important to us," explains Price. "A lot of Insomniacs have experienced working for large companies and know what it's like to be a 'cog in the wheel.' We have a huge amount of pride in the fact that our games live and die by the decisions we make."

On the other hand, when a first-party publisher signs your paycheck, there's more of an assurance that you'll survive if the market changes or something goes horribly wrong. And for the right talent, a lot of money changes hands, and that's going to be very attractive to private owners who've broken their backs for years without striking it rich. "I don't care what people say," shares Surreal's Patmore, "money is a large motivation for these recent acquisitions. Everyone is adamantly independent — until that sack of cash is on your desk."

But money doesn't just provide motivation based on personal gain; it also helps companies make a better product. "In the past, good teams and bad teams separated themselves by talent alone, as the budgets for most games were roughly the same," explains Naughty Dog President Jason Rubin. "These days, only a few teams get access to the budgets and resources needed to create the handful of titles that dominate the industry. Although talent is still a big factor, your game will probably have more polish and a higher degree of quality if you have five times [your normal] budget."

■ Bungie not only provides Microsoft a much anticipated game in *Halo*, but over 10 years of game industry experience

More Than Meets the Eye

When the console manufacturers consider a prospective target, they often look beyond raw assets such as a specific game or designer. Sony may have not only bought its next mascot, but kept a valuable asset out of its competitors' hands. When Microsoft bought Bungie, it acquired a lot more than just an exclusive game; it also gained 10 years of game industry experience. "When Microsoft first started making games, they did it the way they made spreadsheets and word processors," says Bungie Studio Manager Alexander Seropian. "Their teams were organized with programmers who reported to a lead programmer, but that person often wasn't within the same team. We brought in a producer-centric structure and open, 'pit' work areas, and Microsoft adopted some of this structure into their other internal game groups."

Microsoft may also have gained some of the fire it had lost since becoming the corporate machine it is today. Microsoft may be a model of efficiency, but passion isn't something commonly associated with the Redmond, WA giant. "Coming from a little scrappy company that can get erased at any moment, it burns something into your soul that you don't get from working at a big company — a combination of hunger and fear," says Seropian.

Win-Win Situation

Although these acquisition deals are forged between developers and first-party publishers, they will still have a massive impact on the gamer. The heated competition between Sony, Microsoft, and Nintendo to load themselves with top talent will fuel innovation for years to come. Imagine what the best game makers can do with larger budgets and greater resources, and you're gazing into the near future. While the console manufacturers jockey for position in the battle for market dominance, **Next Gen** says it will be the game players who will reap the greatest rewards.

— *Kevin Toyoma*

"Everyone is adamantly independent — until that sack of cash is on your desk."

— Alan Patmore, lead designer, Surreal Software

The X-philes

05/01

The chips, the conference, the network, and a real U.S. launch date?

Recently, Nvidia met probably the most important milestone in its Xbox development: finalizing both the graphical chip and Xbox's "media communications processor." Now manufacturers can begin mass-producing these exceedingly complicated little wafers.

According to Nvidia, the NV20 (better known as the GeForce3) has a staggering 57 million transistors, or "gates." The Xbox version of this chip is said to be at least a generation ahead, although Nvidia refuses to indicate how many transistors it'll have or what physical details differentiate the GeForce3 from its Xbox sister chip.

At the unveiling of the GeForce3 in San Jose, CA, Nvidia CEO Jen-Hsun Huang indicated that the NV20 was nearly the same chip that was going to be in Xbox. However, he did indicate that the new GeForce boards will retail for roughly $500, but he didn't say which internal organs PC gamers should auction on eBay in order to pay for one of his new cards.

Inside "Xfest"

Microsoft recently held its "Xfest" — a pretty exciting name for a rather geeky affair. Not unlike Sony's PS2 developers' conferences, Xfest brought first- and third-party developers to the Redmond, WA home of Microsoft for a day-long series of seminars and meetings on the technical features of Xbox.

Seminars were hosted by Microsoft's Xbox support team, and they allowed early developers to brainstorm on a variety of technical issues. "The audio track was especially strong," says Stormfront Studios President Don Daglow, "with many key engineers available to answer very detailed questions about the tremendous power of the machine."

Daglow, an industry vet who has programmed videogames since before Intellivision, regards Xbox as perhaps the most well-supported platform he's ever worked on. And other developers agree. "Microsoft is doing everything right so far," said one, "but Sony was easy to work with in the beginning too."

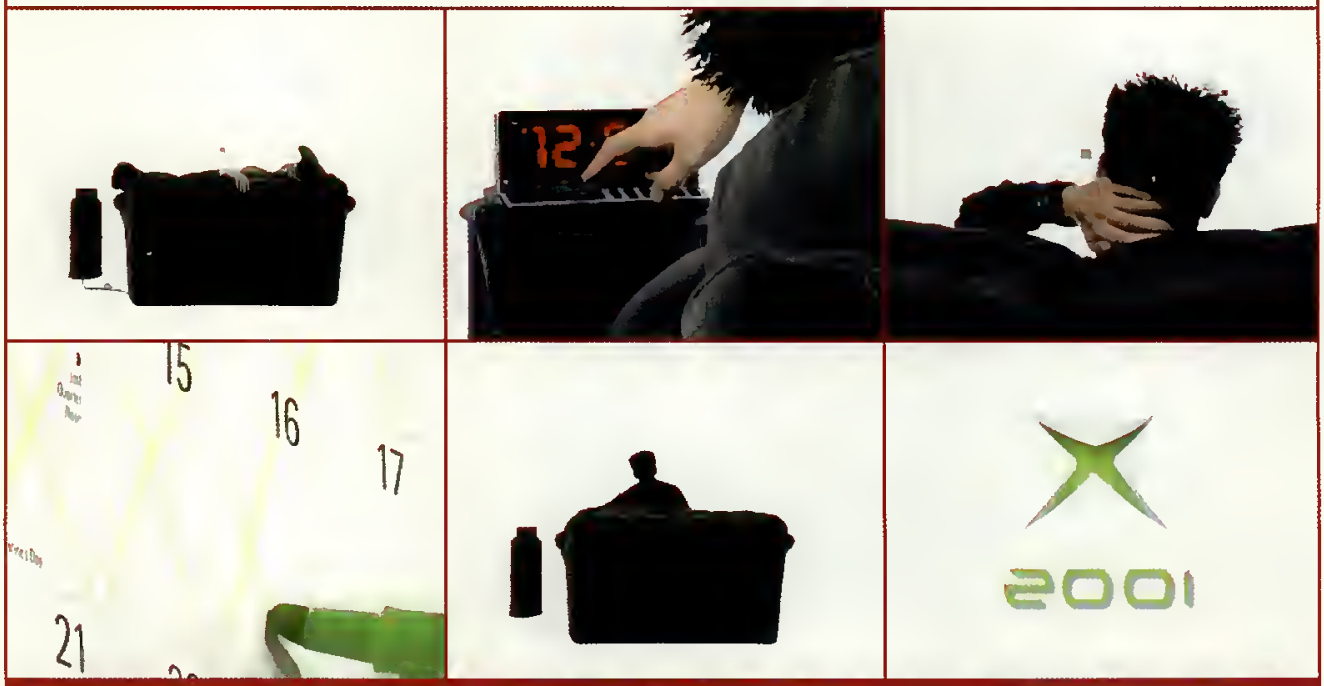
That comment has been echoed throughout the industry of late, with the less-than-sassy launch of PS2 and its lack of full support for developers. Veteran PC developers, who aren't used to working within the strict confines of platform providers, are finding it easier going with Microsoft than Sony. Some regard the Xbox team as more responsive because it is made up of former game designers, while others chaff under Sony's firm control. Nonetheless, if Microsoft is successful, developers will undoubtedly face the same problem that most of them are really afraid of: complacency.

More Rumblings

A few interesting bits of debris have drifted across the river of secrecy around Xbox. The first is that Microsoft will not have a broadband network ready to go for Xbox at launch, supposedly because of the lack of broadband penetration into most U.S. homes. But with recurring rumors that the European Xbox launch may be delayed again, the lack of a network may be due to the Herculean task of launching a new console.

And as anyone with an Internet connection knows that *Star Wars* fans can make short films better than *Episode I*, it should come as no surprise that Xbox fans can, and have, made ads that look like the real thing. Last month, a supposed Xbox teaser that looked utterly convincing made the rounds on the Internet. Microsoft denied it, but it had that professional look, featuring a lonely guy marking Xs on a calendar, apparently waiting for Xbox. The last date without an X? Oct. 17. The only problem? It was made by Roger Tinch, a student at Collins College, in Phoenix, AZ. **Next**Gen

■ **Jim Preston isn't just an all-around swell guy with a Ph.D. in philosophy — he's also an Xbox/PC editor for Daily Radar**



■ **This fake TV ad, broadcast on the Internet, features a gamer who awakes from his couch only to mark his calendar, counting down until the day Xbox launches**

■ TOM RUSSO'S

In the Studio

Development news as it develops

HARRY POTTER AND THE PERILOUS SHOVELWARE

It's no secret that EA won the interactive rights to the *Horry Potter* license last August. What remains secret, though, is how much money the company spent in what is rumored to be one of the most heated bidding wars in the history of videogames. How will EA recoup the cost? Well, they're going to get the first title, a quickly turned-around broomstick racing game (read: kart racing on brooms) out in time to coincide with the November *Horry Potter* movie, riding the expected wave of Pottermania and generating as quick a return on the investment as possible. Other, more substantial *Harry Potter* games, we assume, will arrive sometime in 2002.

UNIVERSAL'S OWN UNIVERSE

While the interactive division doesn't have a stop on the studio tour, there are industry rumblings that Universal Interactive will soon establish itself as its own publishing company. Last year Konami and Universal Interactive announced a partnership in which Konami would publish and develop games that leveraged Universal's intellectual properties. Now, less than a year later, it seems like that tune is changing. Universal is sitting on some hot properties such as *Bruce Lee*. Still we're wondering what Konami will do without the sequel to *Woody Woodpecker Racing*.

RED JADE HITS RED LIGHT

Call it "the handheld that almost was." It was no secret among industry insiders that a new company called Red Jade had spent the last year quietly developing a new handheld gaming device that was to include some startling new features that would have made the term "Advance" in Nintendo's next Game Boy laughable by comparison. Unfortunately, Red Jade's primary investor and master of the cellular universe, Ericsson, pulled the plug on the project. There's no word yet on whether someone else intends to pick up the ball, but sources indicate attempts are being made.

TONY HAWK, MEET SOLID SNAKE

Are game publishers still being gobbled up by other publishers? As of press time, top-placed sources within the game industry had word that Konami was in serious negotiations to acquire Activision. How likely is this deal to happen? Other recent negotiations of this kind have fizzled before, specifically Infogrames' interest in acquiring Eidos.

DUKE NUKEM'S EPISODIC ADVENTURE

While we wait (and wait, and wait) for *Duke Nukem Forever*, Sunstorm Interactive, which developed the original *Deer Hunter*, is hard at work on the first episodic *Duke Nukem* game for PC, to be published by Arush Entertainment. This new 3D side-view game is set in New York City and pits Duke against his original nemesis, Dr. Proton. Arush Entertainment, founded by Jim Perkins, specializes in episodic-game publishing. Perkins also founded FormGen, which published the first shareware games, including *Doom*, and he eventually sold FormGen to GT Interactive for $20 million. The first episode of the *Duke* game is due out this year. For more info on Arush's episodic games, head to www.arushgames.com.

XBOX FIRST PARTIES: THE SECOND WAVE

Microsoft first-party boss Ed Fries continues to pad his stable, signing six more developers to create exclusive, Microsoft-published Xbox titles. There's Vancouver, Canada-based Radical, a veteran whose most recent title is THQ's *MTV Skateboarding*; Curly Monsters, whose founder Nick Burcombe created *WipeOut* for Psygnosis; Tim "*Grim Fandango*" Schafer's newly-formed Double Fine Productions; and Blitz Games, creators of *Chicken Run*. Lesser-known, but not without potential, are Yeti Interactive (which houses a number of ex-*Raymon 2* team members) and Vision Scape Interactive (whose staffers' credits include *Jet Moto 3*, *Twisted Metal 3 & 4*, and *EverQuest*).

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Questions & comments, e-mail kuwitzky@metro3d.com

The shakedown at Nintendo's Retro Studios

Insiders report two projects killed; *Metroid* given 'first' priority

■ Nintendo's funding resulted in some posh office space for Retro, including this in-house screening room. Outside Retro Studios office, you'll note there's no shortage of sports cars

"We never got details from Nintendo on the Internet end. Hell, we had David Zoid, the former network programmer for *Quake I* through *III* saying that he'd write the TCP/IP stack himself and do all of the national server setup if Nintendo would just give him the specs." — Anonymous Retro Employee

With the woes of John Romero's Dallas-based supergroup Ion Storm still lingering in our memory, there is yet another multimillion-dollar Texas developer that has spent tons of money with potentially nothing to show for it. That company? Nintendo's own $40-million-dollar Retro Studios.

In 1998, Retro received major funding from Nintendo to build a multi-million-dollar studio in the city of Austin, with the specific goal of creating GameCube games. In fact, the company was in development with four separate titles: an RPG, a football game, a car combat game, and the game that would become the next-generation *Metroid*.

But that number was cut in half on Feb. 15, when Nintendo forced the layoffs of more than 20 Retro employees. According to sources, the root of Retro Studio's recent problems lies in the developer's grand ambitions and its inability to adequately realize them. Incurring the wrath of the gods at Nintendo, the developer had its football game killed and its car combat game put on "indefinite hold."

So what caused the shake-up at such a promising company? Insiders have leaked us the full story.

The Rise

In early 1999, Retro began growing at a phenomenal rate, nabbing talent from major game houses including Electronic Arts, id Software, Looking Glass Studios, Origin, Valve Software and Iguana Studios. By the middle of 2000, Retro was more than 100-strong and in early software prototype stages based on Nintendo-released specifications of the GameCube console's power.

Under the project lead of John Whitmore, who came to the company from Surreal Software (*Drakon*), Retro Studios began production of a third-person action shooter that starred a voluptuous female heroine, allegedly styled after *Donger Girl*. According to inside sources, disagreements regarding the game's theme and presentation led to its redesign as a first-person shooter. Conflicting reports from Retro employees suggest that the project may, in fact, have undergone two overhauls before Nintendo got involved. "The original design," one employee confided, "was, I think, a little too ambitious for the team at the time."

Shortly before the August 2000 Spaceworld show in Tokyo, Retro was offered the highly regarded *Metroid* license from designer Shigeru Miyamoto and EAD. Retro accepted, spawning another internal conflict: Should Whitmore's game revert to its original third-person design to accommodate the *Metroid* universe, or should it push forward utilizing a first-person view? Allegedly, Whitmore strictly opposed the first-person view in the first place, and fought with the team over the subject, insisting on third-person.

The Many Faces of Metroid

"Many of the people who are working on *Metroid* for GameCube grew up playing the early *Metroids*," a source close to the project told **Next Gen**. "It's got to be understood that Retro knows what the fans want and will try to please them. We need a little slack, and Nintendo needs some careful, gentle prodding."

Yet it was Miyamoto himself who finally terminated *Metroid* as a third-person shooter in favor of a first-person adventure. After the lackluster *Jet Force Gemini*, Miyamoto is said to believe that third-person shooters

GameCube Watch: Special Report

cannot be done properly in 3D. Upon an evaluation visit to Retro's offices, sources suggest he was very dissatisfied with the project's behind-the-back view and asked that it be changed. It ultimately was changed, and Whitmore, frustrated and beaten, resigned from Retro shortly afterward.

"Freaking out about *Metroid* as a first-person adventure was my first reaction too," a company employee told us under the condition of anonymity. "Hell, I still do it. But it's not going to help the *Metroid* team. It's still fine to say that our audience expects the game to use a third-person view. But to say that a first-person view cannot do the franchise justice is, well, debatable."

The team continues to work on *Metroid* as a 3D first-person action game. But translating the play mechanics of *Super Metroid* into a 3D world with a first-person view has proven more difficult than anybody had bargained for, and subsequently the project has started to fall far behind schedule. Worst of all, it wasn't the only one.

In an attempt to light a fire under the collective ass of the company, the football project was terminated entirely and *Car Combat* was ordered to the backburner so that Retro could focus all its energy on *Metroid* and the RPG.

The Roleplaying Game

The company's RPG was one of the first projects started after Retro incorporated. Led by one of the chief designers of the AD&D second edition series, David Cook, and backed by a team of programmers who worked at Origin on *Ultima Online*, it was to be a traditional RPG set in a medieval universe. The game was going to enable customizable character building, voice-acted dialogue, and it was to feature an art style inspired by the artist Keith Parkinson, who previously illustrated book covers for author David Eddings. "No cute teen *wunderkins* saving the world," a Retro source explained. "Our RPG was much more realistic, grittier, and with fantastic locales."

In mid-2000, the team decided to switch the RPG's focus and put a greater emphasis on action. It would still feature all of the party advancement and character interaction options, of course, but it would forego traditional turn-based battles in favor of a realtime fight system. It would also use a third-person, behind-the-back view. "We wanted to try for something very similar to *Zelda* for Nintendo 64," said one Retro employee, "with our own twists."

Like the company's *Metroid* project, however, the RPG was behind schedule and internally not expected to be ready for GameCube until late 2002.

The Launch Games that Weren't

While *Metroid* and the RPG were both lagging, Retro's football and car combat games were proceeding as scheduled for the GameCube system launch. The football project led by Dan Baker, dubbed *Football 2002*, was to feature both arcade and sim elements but didn't attempt to master either. "It was more *Blitz*-style," a company source confided. "There was a realization by the team that it couldn't compete with *Madden*, especially when EA could just port its franchise to GameCube and polish the hell out of it. So instead they went for a faster, more free-form game."

■ **Matt Casamassina, the biggest GameCube sleuth in the videogame industry, is the editor-in-chief of IGN64.com**

The car combat title, ironically, with the internal codename *Car Combat*, was going to make use of GameCube's online capabilities for vehicular-based multiplayer modes. The game was to offer both four-player splitscreen and online action, but the online part never came together.

"We never got details from Nintendo on the Internet end," our anonymous source commented. "Hell, we had David Zoid, the former network programmer for *Quake I* through *III* saying that he'd write the TCP/IP stack himself and do all of the national server setup if Nintendo would just give him the specs."

(continued on page 14)

GameCube Watch: Special Report

(continued from page 13)

The Axeman Cometh

Fueled by reports of big company spending and unimpressed by the progress Retro Studios had been making with its *Metroid* and RPG projects, Nintendo Co. Ltd. ordered Nintendo of America to take action. On Feb. 15 of this year, NOA Producer Jeff Miller flew from his Seattle base to Austin with the task of laying off more than 20 Retro employees. In an attempt to light a fire under the collective ass of the company, the football project was terminated entirely and *Cor Combot* was ordered to the backburner so that Retro Studios could focus all its energy on *Metroid* and the still nameless RPG. The hope was that the team could complete *Metroid* and the RPG in time for GameCube's launch in the United States.

"Originally *Football 2002* was the sole football launch title for GameCube," a source inside Retro told us, "and now it's been cut loose because EA Sports and Sega are bringing their well-respected franchises to the table. There's just no more room. Honestly, Nintendo doesn't care about football all that much. It'll sell here in the States, but not in Europe or Japan."

Cor Combat, meanwhile, was shelved because the technology required to realize the true online multiplayer ambitions of the title wasn't made available.

"Nintendo's Internet strategy was up in the air," explained another source. "Every time Jeff Miller of NOA would come down we'd ask what was going on with it, and we'd get no answers because he didn't have any. That doesn't mean there weren't any, but NOA wasn't willing or able to share them with a second-party developer making an Internet title — go figure."

When the hatchet fell, where was Retro Studios Founder and President Jeff Spangenberg? He was reportedly so upset by the entire fiasco that he stayed home from work while it happened. An NOA spokesperson would not offer specifics, but did comment: "The reason for layoffs was to tighten the focus of the company and its effort toward Nintendo GameCube games, for which they are responsible."

The Light at the End of the Tunnel

After a rough beginning, the future for Retro Studios, oddly, looks brighter than ever. The *Metroid* team has grown to include more than 11 dedicated programmers (one of whom is the respected David Zoid), three designers, and a healthy supply of extremely talented artists.

"The team has some really innovative ideas for jumping, targeting, and camera," a company employee explained. "I think the title could surprise a lot of people in the way that *GoldenEye* did for Nintendo 64."

The RPG has seen a similar boost in talent and, with a new design spec that emphasizes action and roleplaying elements, sources indicate it is more solidly balanced than before. The team has also allegedly decided to forego any multiplayer modes in favor of a strong single-player experience. Nintendo has set a deadline requiring the RPG team to have one fully playable chapter of the game ready in time for E3, in preparation for a launch later this year.

In all likelihood, Retro will make its E3 deadlines with playables of both games. But whether the games are ready this fall for launch is still completely in the realm of speculation. **Next**Gen

■ **Art created by Keith Parkinson, such as the two pieces shown here, served as the visual inspiration for Retro's upcoming action RPG**

R. E. T. R. O.

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1835A Kramer Lane, Suite 100
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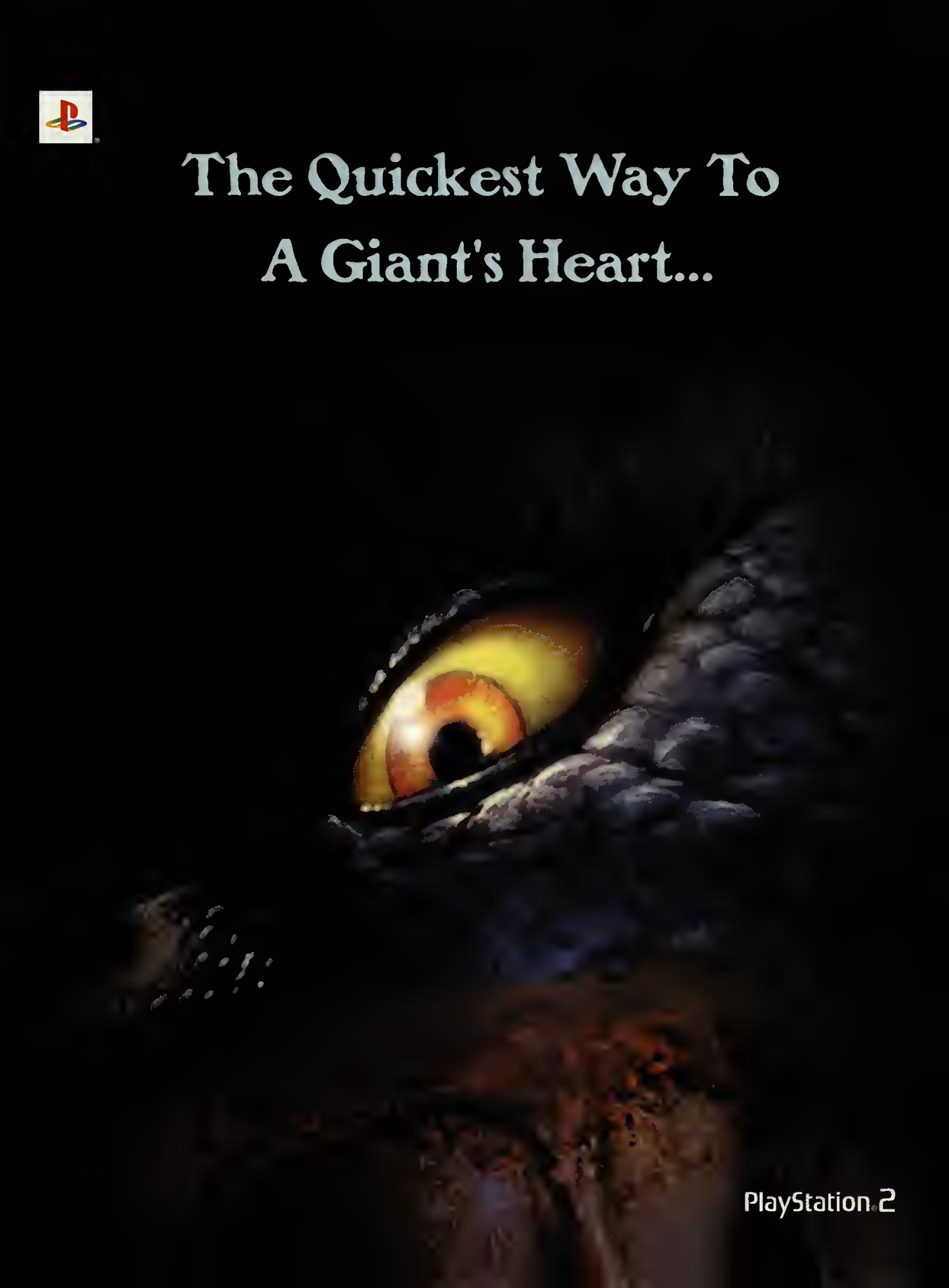
■ **Retro posted this job advertisement for *Metroid* programmers on its web site. The project was, even at that point, the worst-kept secret in the industry. Within an hour from when it was posted, Nintendo demanded that Retro take the advertisement down**

The Quickest Way To A Giant's Heart...



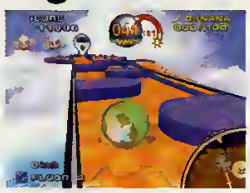
PlayStation 2

■ While still offering impressive games, this year's AOU show was considerably smaller than past events; (right) Sega's *Virtua Fighter 4* was show's the biggest draw

■ ARCADE UPDATE

AOU Amusement Expo Debuts New Coin-ops

Sega steals the show with *Virtua Fighter 4*



■ Amusement Vision's *Monkey Ball* gives *Marble Madness* a third-person perspective

The bad news for gamers is that fewer exhibitors appeared at the recent AOU (Arcade Operators Union) Amusement Expo, held Feb. 23-24 in Tokyo. Following a trend in game companies' focusing more on home entertainment than arcades, Capcom was among those conspicuously absent. The good news is that some great games are still coming out from the companies that were in attendance, such as mainstays Sega, Konami, Midway, and Namco.

The biggest draw of the show was video of Yu Suzuki's *Virtua Fighter 4* (see Milestones, page 56), which showed off the potential of the Naomi 2 board. During his presentation, Suzuki put to rest a growing rumor of an upcoming *Virtua Fighter vs. Tekken* joint venture, saying the two games are too different to consider such a project.

Konami released sequels to each of its Bemani games, which enable users to link two guitars, two keyboards, and drums from different games together to form a band. Along with Konami's *Silent Scope 3* and its motion-sensor boxing game *Mocopboxing*, other impressive offerings included Taito's *Stunt Typhoon*, Amusement Vision's *Virtuo Striker 3* and the *Marble Madness*-esque *Monkey Ball*.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Japanese show if it didn't feature some oddball games: Both Namco and Konami showed photography-based games, and Wow Entertainment unveiled *Inu no Sonpo*, a dog-walking game.

It was whispered that Namco's *Soul Calibur 2* was postponed because of the presence of *Virtuo Fighter 4*, although the game should be presented at the JAMMA show at the end of the year.

— Kevin Toyama/ Christophe Kagotani

■ Only from Japan will you find games based on photography and dog-walking

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Alphas

Next Generation gleans the secrets of the newest games, recorded in the diary of a madman

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■ PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX, PC

OZZY'S BLACK SKIES

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **iRock International** ■ Release Date: **Q4** ■ Origin: **US**

Castles in the sky, aerial combat astride mythical beasts, and three versions of Ozzy Osbourne. Will this game be a revelation, or just a shot in the dark?

How's this for a gaming moment? It's dawn, and you're riding the wind astride a purple-skinned dragon. Your enemy, Oculus — a creature resembling a huge eyeball sporting wings and tentacles — approaches, and the familiar bass line of Ozzy Osbourne's "Crazy Train" thumps ominously to life. Bursting from your hiding place in the clouds, you unleash a salvo of fireballs into it, setting it aflame as it dives for the safety of a river below. You give chase, only to find yourself nearly knocked from the sky by a gigantic winged brontosaur apparently composed of nothing but black, living tar magically encased in orange armor plating. You realize it's a

■ Water will be present in every level, and with good reason — certain attacks can literally set your mount on fire

Alphas

■ Virtwyn steeds (like Zelit, shown here) are often modeled after dragons, griffons, and other mythical beasts. They are fast flyers and excellent marksmen

■ The game's weather system will generate everything from wind, rain, and lightning (below), to tornados and waterspouts composed of molten lava

trap, and as the first strains of Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" begin pouring adrenaline into the air, a flying manta ray, spewing lightning and flanked by a strange creature that looks like a cross between Pegasus and a scorpion appears on the horizon, headed straight for you...

This is the world of *Ozzy's Black Skies*, an upcoming fantasy-themed combat flight sim in which three armies (the noble Virtwyn, the scientific Chrysalis, and the vile, necromantic Pariah) battle for dominance over a splintered kingdom. The player controls the chosen clan's ace pilot — and each is a reincarnation of the noble King Ozzy, the licensed likeness of the one and only Ozzy Osbourne.

Of course, despite their popularity with the youth and mainstream markets, licensed games are usually junk. Before we can say *Dukes of Hozzord*, however, iRock Lead Designer Rick Raymer reassures us.

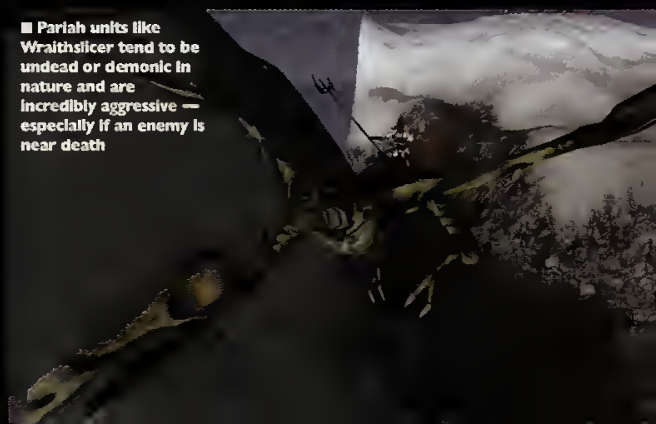
"At the core of it all, if you stripped away the license, we'd still have a really strong game," he says. "That has always been very important to us. The

> **"We really want you to feel as if you're on a living, breathing creature."**
> — Robert Stevenson, executive producer, iRock Interactive

question is always, 'How can we get more Ozzy in, but without having to sacrifice gameplay?'" Indeed, Ozzy takes a back seat to this beautiful fantasy world and the incredible creatures that populate it.

And what creatures they are. There are 24 amazing steeds in the game, ranging from giant birds and legendary dragons to a winged pig or a rotting, undead Pegasus. Say what you want

■ Pariah units like Wraithslicer tend to be undead or demonic in nature and are incredibly aggressive — especially if an enemy is near death



■ Different campaigns sometimes use the same missions. A Virtwyn player would be assigned to destroy these sky trees, but a Chrysalis player would need to defend them

■ Some flyers, like Oculus, are modeled after insects, so they are much more maneuverable, though also more difficult to fly

about a P51-B Mustang, but it doesn't feel anywhere near as cool as charging into battle on a Chinese dragon.

The real key to the experience, however, is the unique, organic flight model. "In this game, we really want you to feel as if you're on a living, breathing creature," explains Robert Stevenson, the game's executive producer. Each creature's abilities are defined by some 56 parameters — rate and power of wing flapping, energy expended per flap, creature mass and inertia, and so on — lifted from real-world flying animals. This has enabled IRock to accurately model the flight of "real life" dragons — a common term throughout our visit, but one that never failed to illicit an ironic chuckle.

Not unlike various planes in a traditional flight sim, each flying beast will offer a unique feel. Oculus, for instance, zips about like a giant insect, changing direction on a dime. Others, like the massive, lumbering dragon Zelit, fly like enormous eagles, power diving and swooping in and out of battle. Stamina is also an issue — a fatigued mount may not have the energy to pull off a complex evasive maneuver or execute a special attack at the appropriate moment.

The single-player missions often resemble those in LucasArts' excellent *Star Wors Starfighter*, a comparison Stevenson is quick to concede. "It's really the closest thing on PS2 to what we're doing — especially the mission structure." Of course, where in *Storfighter*, you'd protect the queen's ship as it passes through an asteroid field, *Ozzy's Black Skies* will find you riding a winged lynx and defending a palace from the War Pig, the game's answer to a Star Destroyer. There are 30 missions in all (10 per campaign), running the gamut from basic surveillance and escort assignments to kidnapping, one-on-one duels, or simple decimation of the enemy. There will also be multiplayer modes, such as deathmatch and Capture the Flag, though broadband support for PS2 has grudgingiy been dropped in favor of

HE WAS EATEN BY A WHAT?

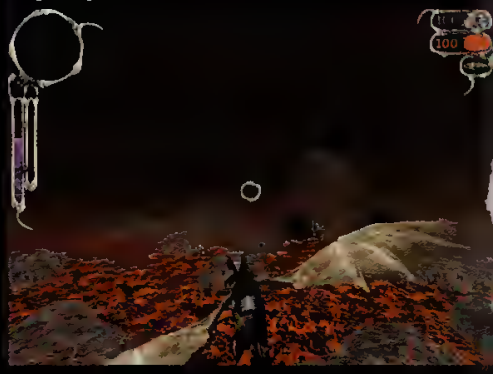
Black Skies' opening cinema establishes the game's three various factions in classic, fun-if-not-necessarily-logical heavy metal fashion: Ouring a pitched battle with the necromancer Mortalvis, King Ozzy was swallowed by a giant bat (a nicely ironic touch, we think). His kingdom then fractured, with various portions falling under the control of Ozzy's two closest advisors, and Mortalvis. His soul, too, burst into three fragments, and each was reincarnated in a separate part of his former kingdom. This, then, is what enables the player to choose from three riders who, though markedly different, are all unmistakably Ozzy.

■ The game's flight model is based upon birds and insects instead of planes. Zelit here maneuvers like a giant bird of prey

■ Many enemies have attacks that are elemental in nature, like Wraithslicer's lightning bolt

■ These shots are from the PC version and feature only preliminary lighting. The final product will look even better

■ One level will find the player navigating a vast network of tunnels under a volcano, *Return of the Jedi*-style



two-player splitscreen.

Combat itself rests somewhere between the airborne maneuvering of a WWII dogfighting sim and the explosive mayhem of *Twisted Metal*. Each mount and rider has both basic and special attacks, ranging from claw swipes to laser eye beams, and arenas are littered with additional power-ups that increase speed or health, or even endow your mount with invisibility or vampiric abilities. There is water on every stage, to be used when your creature is on fire or needs to wash away poison — a feature inspired by last year's *Flying Heroes*, a primitive, bargain-priced fantasy flight combat sim. There are also ground-based units, ranging from simple archers and primitive railguns to fire-breathing basilisks and giant plants that hurl objects (boulders, cannonballs, cows) at you like a catapult.

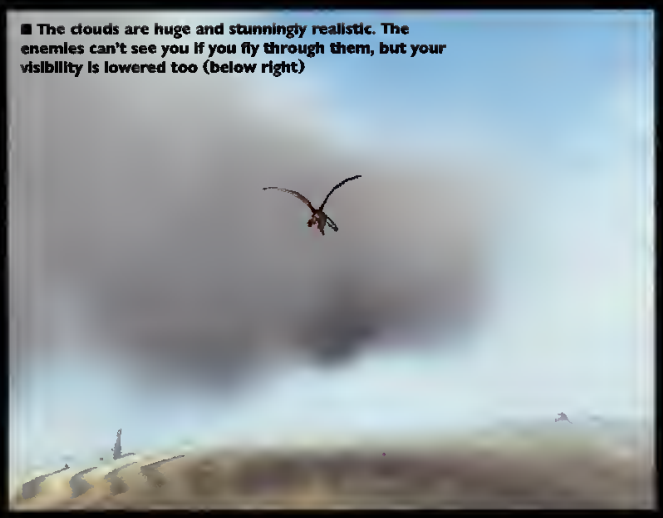
The game's 15 environments are nearly as breathtaking as the creatures who navigate them. Black spires pierce a red sky in a volcanic wasteland, and giant trees float above the surface of a dense jungle. Nearly every environment, be it desert ruins, an icy mountain stronghold, or a gas refinery nestled in a swamp, is vast and exquisitely modeled. Brian Tate, lead level designer, credits iRock's proprietary RF engine, which, he states, "can actually process more geometry than the PS2 can store." There is a weather model in place as well, which will not only produce wind and rain, but updrafts, tornados, and lava spouts. *Block Skies* also sports amazing clouds that exist in 3D space and that you actually hide in to conceal yourself from enemies.

THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER SAY: "BITE ME, OZZY"

Few celebrities have inspired quite as many urban legends and popular rumors as Ozzy Osbourne. For the record, he has never mutilated a German Shepherd onstage or required the crowd to kill puppies before he performed. In fact, he once demanded a hotel feed a stray dog he'd found because he was a guest and the dog was with him. But he did indeed once bite the head off a live bat that had been thrown onstage — he had reportedly believed it to be fake. And, on another occasion, Ozzy orally decapitated a live dove his manager (and later wife) Sharon had purportedly meant for him to release as part of a publicity stunt. Chalk that one up to booze and miscommunication. For gamers hoping to see this now-trademark behavior surface in the game — no promises, because things change — let's just say we've read the scripts for the ending cinematics, and one of them reminded us of a rumor we once heard.

■ Born of alchemy, Chrysalis units like Kedle (above) are a hive-mind, and so they react very quickly to your actions. They are typically mutants and can withstand brutal damage

■ There are 24 mounts in the game, but there were originally 30. Gillbourne (above) is one who didn't make the cut



■ The clouds are huge and stunningly realistic. The enemies can't see you if you fly through them, but your visibility is lowered too (below right)

Black Skies sports amazing clouds that exist in 3D space and that you can actually hide in to conceal yourself from enemies.

Of course, what would an Ozzy game be without a soundtrack featuring the Ozzman himself? There are six licensed songs, three of which are new recordings of established favorites: "Paranoid" and "War Pigs," because Ozzy doesn't have the rights to the original versions, and "Crazy Train," for which the original recordings literally could not be found. A new tune was written specifically for the game and is titled "Black Skies" (we saw that one coming), and two more recent songs, "No More Tears" and "See You on the Other Side," will round out the set. Six songs might seem a bit skimpy, but as the music is being incorporated dynamically — says Stevenson: "We didn't want it to sound like a jukebox" — they should prove more than enough to keep gamers' heads banging.

Not everything we learned was promising. Online multiplay, already cut from the PS2 version, was a huge component of the game. If the single-player missions, which were not yet ready during our visit, fail to come together, longevity may suffer. But so far, the game is solid and beautiful, and iRock seems legitimately committed to creating a great game first, and a licensed game second. If they can maintain this focus, we'll find ourselves unable to resist saddling up the dragon and launching ourselves into Ozzy's *Black Skies*. — *Eric Bratcher*

■ Airborne enemies aren't the only ones you'll have to deal with. When this level is fully populated, this Pariah cathedral may be guarded by undead footsoldiers, a ballista, or even a catapult that fires corpses

■ PLAYSTATION 2

HERDY GERDY

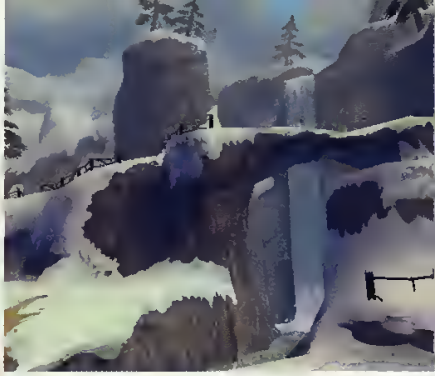
■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Core Design** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **UK**

Core Design's revolutionary platformer takes PS2 to new visual heights

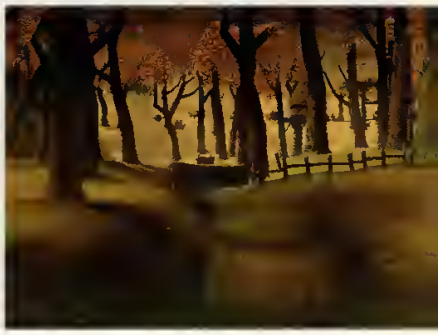
Say what you want about *Tomb Raider*, but it was one of the first truly revolutionary games of the 32-bit generation and it inspired millions of fans worldwide. In fact, the game is still a major influence to developers today with respect to character and game design. Besides Lara's quintology, however, U.K.-based Core Design hasn't had any other recent breakthrough projects. But on PlayStation 2, the company is daring lightning to strike twice with an all-new game that is as ambitious as it is beautiful. *Herdy Gerdy*, despite its rather silly-sounding name, looks to be one of the first games that breaks the generation barrier and provides an experience that just wasn't possible before. Oh, and about the screens you see on these pages? They're all realtime 3D gameplay shots.

Gerdy, the star of *Herdy Gerdy*, is actually a shepherd who must undertake an epic quest to both save his father from a horrible curse and vanquish the evil Adolph in a Master Herding competition. Comparisons will inevitably be drawn to *Zelda*, since Gerdy wanders many lands, meets NPCs that give him side quests, and solves puzzles to get items and move to new locations. The big twist is that, unlike the Miyamoto classic and its legions of clones, this game isn't actually focused on combat, but instead on herding. This shift is far more dramatic than you might initially think, and, believe it or not, it

■ While all of these screens represent exterior locations, the game will eventually allow players to go into many of the buildings they find and explore their interiors



■ Core has done an extraordinary job with its 3D engine technology. These landscapes (above and below) are actual in-engine shots



should be lots of fun too.

"Telling you a game is about herding sounds incredibly dull," admits Core Operations Director and *Herdy Gerdy* Producer Adrian Smith. "There are only so many ways you can herd something before it gets boring. So we were very conscious of this, and we don't actually tell people it's a game about herding. People will play the game and they'll just get absorbed in the adventure, the mystery, and everything that goes with it, and they won't realize that everything that's in there is herding." For example, at one point Gerdy finds a bear cub in the woods and must solve puzzles involved with getting him out and to his mother. Herding, technically, sure, but it's more interesting than that. Smith elaborates, "The herding side of the game is almost something that people will just accept that they have to do. It isn't so blatant as saying 'tend to these animals, get these animals into a pen.' It's a lot more driven by the story."

And that simplistic style of herding, Smith explains, is just the beginning. "Initially, it's simply one-on-one. Gerdy must put some Doops [one of the many types of bizarre creatures on the island] somewhere. But later on, he might have to get the Doops out to chase the Bleeps away and they, in turn, might scare the Gromps out," he says. "Or you might have to use the horn to push animals out of the bushes, but if you push the animals out of the bushes you might break up a pack of Doops."

Listening to Smith talk about the game's characters sounds as if he's reading from a Dr. Seuss book, but it hints at the sheer depth of the game. The genius of *Herdy Gerdy* lies in the fact that the world is actually filled with living, thinking (relatively, at least) creatures, each with its own set of rules and behavior patterns that Gerdy must figure out and exploit to succeed in the game. It's these complex social dynamics that players must eventually unravel in every level if they

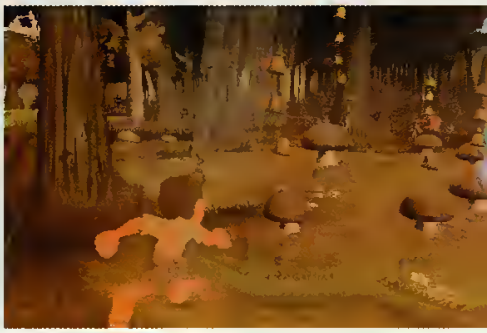
"The herding side of the game is almost something that people will just accept that they have to do."

— Adrian Smith, producer, Core Design

■ The creatures pictured in these screens are called Doops. They are pretty much the simplest form of life that Gerdy will have to herd, yet they still have their own rules that you will have to work around

Alphas

■ Gerdy's world is teeming with life. The overall effect is eerily similar to something you would expect in a high-end animated film



hope to succeed in their quests. And to succeed, Smith say that players will always have to survey their environs and weigh all of their assets. "We know that Doops can swim in water," he explains. "They don't actually like to go in water, but they will go in water and float and keep their heads up. So therefore you might have to put them in water to drive them past the Gromps, because the Gromps hate water and they would do anything at all to keep away from water." As you might imagine, this opens up not only tons of gameplay possibilities, but game balancing nightmares as well. "It's a bit like throwing a stone in a pool and watching the ripples go out," admits Smith. "We actually don't know how the gameplay's going to play. It's very unpredictable to us, so we've worked out all the possibilities and then populated each world to see what happens."

The world where all the action takes place is as unusual and compelling as the gameplay. "The whole premise was to create a Disney-esque videogame," confides Smith. "We decided that we wanted to go with this whole graphical look and feel, with very rich and vibrant hand-painted backgrounds combined with an almost traditional, cel-type, drawn and animated characters." As you can see in the shots, Core has definitely succeeded in its goals. Gerdy's world is almost a living, breathing entity ripped straight out of a Disney film — several of the game's artists are actually from world-class animation studios. As Gerdy runs through the grass, for example, displaced butterflies will take to the air around him.

"The world that we wanted to create was a very real world, so that when Gerdy looks at the river you'll see the fish swimming," explains Smith. "Most of the 300 [creatures modeled for the game] are actually background animals. They're not animals that Gerdy can interact with, but they'll actually have an effect on his world. For instance, if there are a lot of cows in this field and Gerdy goes tearing across the field, it'll upset the cows and they will gallop off and perhaps upset a pack of Doops that you were trying to keep together."

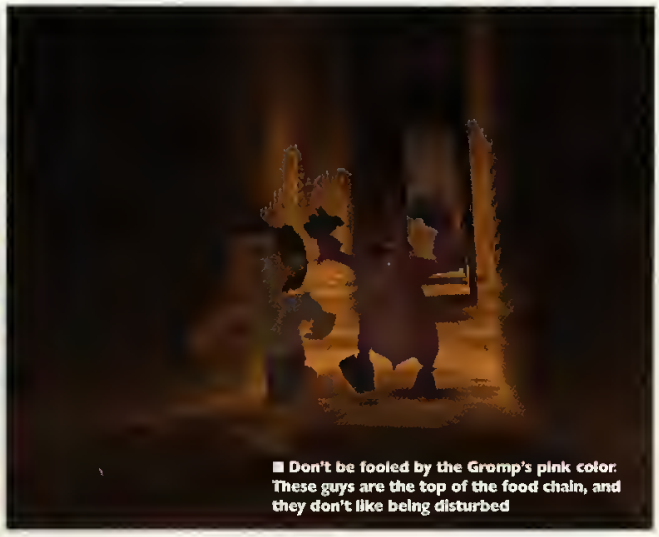
Still, as breathtaking as it all is, there's a high cost to Core's achievement. "Our level sizes are around 800 to 900MB in

LESS READING, MORE HERDING

If you're anxious to get some herding in before the release of *Herdy Gerdy*, you have a few options available to you. The first is Empire Interactive's game Sheep for PlayStation and PC. In Sheep, you (surprise) herd sheep though a variety of different environs and obstacles. While it's not the world's greatest game, it did get 4 stars in NG 03/01. If your budget is really, really tight, however, you can go to www.sheepgame.co.uk and play their web-based herding game. Sure, it's low-tech, but when you need sheep now, this is the place to go.

■ As Gerdy continues his quest, he will discover tons of different areas to explore, from deep underground caves to frigid, snowcapped mountain peaks

■ Gerdy isn't alone on the island. From time to time he will come across NPCs who will either help or hinder him in his quest



■ Don't be fooled by the Gromp's pink color. These guys are the top of the food chain, and they don't like being disturbed

size," admits Smith. "They're absolutely huge, and they're made up mostly of textures." It's quite a feat considering that a lot of developers have had problems with the VRAM-deficient PS2 hardware.

While all of the animations weren't in the version that we were able to play, it was already evident that the team was giving them just as much attention as the art. Take, for example, Gerdy himself. "Gerdy is a very highly animated character," boasts Smith. "When he runs his cheeks puff, his eyes roll, and he hunches his back more." Even his clothing and hair are highly detailed and flow with his every move.

Core is also taking an important step that others have missed in the past with the seamless blending of natural-looking animation and control, so that players are never forced out of the illusory world of the game. For example, if you start to creep — all control is, of course, full analog — Gerdy will slowly speed up as his momentum gets going. It's a barely noticeable touch that we may have missed had it not been pointed out, but it's one that makes the vision all the more complete. Another neat touch is the camera that pitches from side to side while Gerdy is running across the environment.

Ultimately, *Herdy Gerdy* is a game that seems to have perfectly achieved the balance between vision and technology. The only riddle that remains unanswered at this point is whether or not the gameplay will live up to its initial promises. Core has already proven that it can follow through on an ambitious vision, and this looks to be no exception. — *Blake Fischer*

"The world that we wanted to create was a very real world, so that when Gerdy looks at the river you'll see the fish swimming."

— Adrian Smith, producer, Core Design

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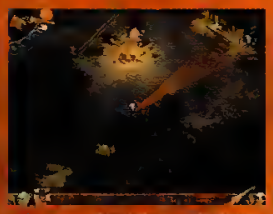

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■ PC, XBOX

AQUANOX

■ Publisher **Fishtank Interactive** ■ Developer **Massive Development** ■ Release Date: **Fall** ■ Origin: **Germany**

Going underwater to kick some serious brain

The small, grey, landlocked German city of Mannheim is hardly the sort of place you'd go for a dazzling underwater adventure. Still, the folks at Massive Development (not to be confused with *Ground Control* alumnus Massive Entertainment) hasn't let a small thing like location get in the way of their overactive imaginations. In fact, with its newest submarine game, *Aquonox*, the team may be creating the definitive underwater action adventure, with visuals that have to be seen to be believed.

The game is actually a sequel to Massive's 1997 hit, *Archimedon Dynosty*, and it continues the story of the main character, Emerald "Dead Eye" Flint. For players who missed the inaugural adventure, it introduced us to a world some 600 years in the future, where a nuclear winter has destroyed the landscape and human beings have retreated to underwater cities to survive. *Aquonox* continues the story five years later, with Flint still trying to make a go of it as a submarine captain for hire in an ocean full of sharks of all sorts.

On PC, gameplay can be handled one of two ways: through a force feedback joystick in the third person for flight sim fans, or with the familiar mouse/keyboard combo and a first-person view for shooter veterans. The emphasis is certainly on action rather than simulation — some subs like the "Phobocaster" can go faster than 500 knots, after all — but players will be able to turn off their engines and use the current to silently slip by enemy sonar, allowing for a combination of both eye-bulging action and sneaking strategy. As Alexander Jorias, Massive's managing director and cofounder, succinctly explains it, "Think of a fast-paced mixture of *Unreal* and *Starlancer*, and you've got an idea of what we're doing with *Aquonox*."

Throughout the 30+ single-player missions, gamers will have to negotiate waters full of political factions like the Atlantic Federation, the Russo-Japanese Shogunat, the Terror Tourists of the South Pacific, and remorseless conglomerates like EnTrOX. Flint will be

■ More than 8000 kilometers of undersea world were created for *Aquonox*, complete with reefs, caves, and plenty of seaweed

able to change allegiances throughout the game, but his fellow bipeds may be the least of his problems. Through a clever combination of in-game cinematics and cut scenes, players discover that a terrible accident with a secret satellite has unleashed havoc. An ancient race of enormous aquatic creatures has been awakened, and it will take just about every missile and plasma blast you've got to survive.

So just how enormous are these creatures? According to Jorias, they're "so huge you have to go inside of them and wipe out their brains." And while we might have suggested using 'N Sync music for such a task, Massive has decided to present the player with nine different vehicles, each with a wide variety of upgradeable items. As Jorias explains it, there will be "a whole range of projectile and plasma weapons, active and passive torpedoes, as well as mines, armor, and all sorts of neat devices that are perfect for brain hunting!" And though that scenario does sound outlandish and fun, *Aquonox* is not simply a bizarre underwater shooter.

The toughest part about playing the game may be taking your eyes off the spectacular graphics. When Nvidia

■ Players will have to coordinate with their wingmen in order to survive the game's massive battles

■ Although the emphasis is on action, players will have to take into account things like water pressure and currents

WHAT WERE THEY THINKING?

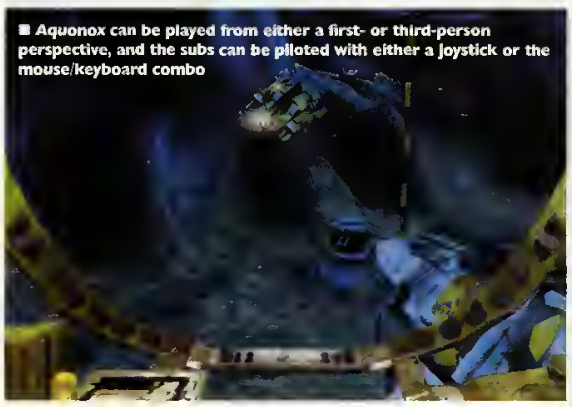
Perhaps the most unusual submarine in the history of naval combat is the I-400 of the Royal Japanese Navy. This enormous and expensive 1944 sub had one claim to fame: It contained three small aircraft that were launched with pneumatic catapults. The three torpedo bombers were meant to take off from the sub but never land. Naturally, the I-400 was never used effectively before the end of WWII.

began showing early examples of its new NV20 chip to the press (see News, page 04), a rolling demo of *Aquonox* was used to demonstrate its power. "We had access to this awesome piece of hardware very early," says Jorias, "and we support the whole range of NV20's features like vertex shaders, pixel shaders, quad texturing, etc."

The results are so spectacular and ambitious that *Aquonox* and its Krass engine are actually being used as benchmark tests for the new video boards. The demo we saw was truly impressive, with colorful ships arcing gracefully through golden beams of sunlight, and realtime soft shadows falling across the gorgeous, bump-mapped terrain. The watery world is filled with high-poly models, truly humongous creatures, and entire undersea cities. But for PC gamers wondering if their PII 500 and Voodoo 3 will last them another season, they can forget about it. *Aquonox* will require a studly, manly man of an accelerator and make most video cards weep like little schoolchildren.

In addition to the single-player experience, the game will support up to eight players over a LAN or the Internet. Although traditional and team deathmatch are supported, there isn't much information on other forms of multiplayer action.

While life at 15,000 feet below the surface is technically pitch black, Massive is clearly silly-puttying some rules, putting graphics and fun before dark realism. *Aquonox* may be the next step in graphical advancement, but its gameplay pedigree is situated in reliable fun. — *Jim Preston*



■ Aquonox can be played from either a first- or third-person perspective, and the subs can be piloted with either a joystick or the mouse/keyboard combo

■ Massive Development's complicated world takes advantage of nearly every feature in Nvidia's new NV20 chip

■ DREAMCAST

CRAZY TAXI 2

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Hit Maker** ■ Release Date: **Q2 (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Unsafe at any speed

Over the last year or two, few games have offered more pure, unadulterated fun per minute than *Crazy Taxi* for Dreamcast. Its few faults could be attributed to its arcade origins; intense in small doses, the game's shine wore off somewhat over the long haul because the blistering pace and ticking clock didn't really afford the chance to explore and uncover its more subtle charms.

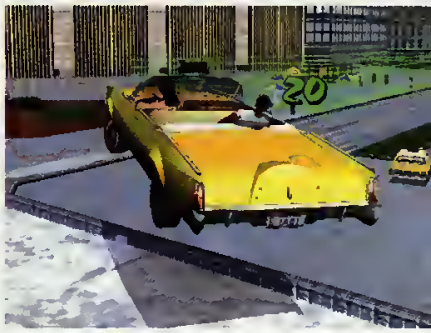
Crazy Taxi 2, however, is being built from the ground up as a console title, exclusive (for the moment) to Dreamcast. Although the core of the gameplay — pick up fares and get them to their destinations as quickly as possible — will remain largely unchanged, developer Hit Maker seems determined to tailor the sequel around something other than the need to get players to dig out another quarter. To a certain extent, the time clock has been de-emphasized, and this time around you'll actually get the chance to enjoy the scenery and explore.

Moving the game setting some 3,000 miles, *Crazy Taxi 2* relocates from hilly San Francisco to the urban sprawl and towering skyscrapers of New York. In part, this is owing to the developer's desire to play up a more 3D approach to getting

■ **Considering how compulsively playable the original game was, we fully expect the sequel to offer more of the same thrills, if in a slightly grittier, East-Coast style**

■ There's nothing quite like flying a taxi through the heart of Manhattan, and you can bet you'll get the full-on air grab experience

■ As impressive-looking as the original was, developer Hit Maker hopes to add even more visual variety to the sequel



If you thought you could catch a lot of air romping around the hills of San Francisco, try flying from the observation deck of the Empire State Building and seeing if you can clear Central Park.

across town, enabling you to rise high above the streets and take to the rooftops as much as possible. If you thought you could catch a lot of air romping around the hills of San Francisco, try flying from the observation deck of the Empire State Building and seeing if you can clear Central Park — which may, in fact, be the only way to beat the traffic. New York is quite a crowded city, and *Crazy Taxi 2* is intended to reflect that idea, so you can expect to find sidewalks crowded with people and streets jammed with other vehicles. Although this obviously will require a great deal more skill and patience, it also provides a clear motivation for exploration and finding alternate routes — like bouncing from rooftop to rooftop.

Other changes and additions include a completely new set of cab drivers, as well as a different selection of taxis, the ones from the previous game having been deemed "too West Coast" for the Big Apple. Hit Maker also plans to enable players to pick up more than one person at a time, since the design team found multiple people packed into the back of the cab to be "visually interesting" and funny. You can also expect a number of New York landmarks, and a few surprise obstacles may also put in an appearance (think big, think furry, think a fondness for blondes and a hatred of circling airplanes).

The original game featured a mode known as the "Crazy Box," a series of highly challenging mini-games — picking up a certain number of passengers within a time limit or racing to the end of a twisted dock without falling off. These weren't found in the original arcade version but were in fact added for the home release. Given that the Box was one of the most entertaining features of the first *Crazy Taxi*, we fully expect that the sequel, completely designed for the home, will be every bit as compulsively enjoyable.

— Jeff Lundrigon/Christophe Kogotoni

STILL DREAMCAST AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

Despite Sega's desire to branch out onto other platforms, *Crazy Taxi 2* will not, for now at least, be making an appearance on PlayStation 2 or Xbox. Having developed a game engine exclusively for Dreamcast, the team would prefer to stick with its strengths. Kenji Kanno, producer on both games, says, "I would do it if I could make more players enjoy the *Crazy Taxi* experience, but I'm not in favor of doing a simple conversion just because it's what everyone else is doing. I'd prefer to design something new that takes full advantage of a console's hardware."

So for now, Dreamcast owners can look forward to more fare-fueled mayhem, more races against time, and an even bigger city to play in.

■ Sega's Wow Entertainment has been working with Sony arcade boards since last summer

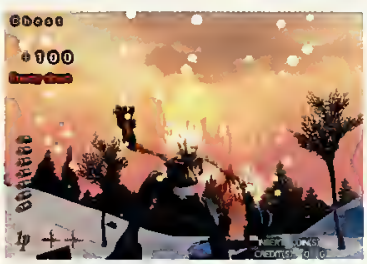
■ ARCADE

VAMPIRE NIGHT

■ Publisher: **Namco** ■ Developer: **Wow Entertainment** ■ Release Date: **Spring** ■ Origin: **Japan**

A gun game running on a Sony board... developed by Sega?

Most hardcore Sega gamers are probably focused on *Virtua Fighter 4* and other upcoming offerings on PS2, but the first Sega venture on Sony-based hardware will actually run on Namco's System 246 arcade board. Sega arcade division Wow Entertainment is developing this title for Namco, making *Vampire Night* the first test to determine how quickly Sega can pick up outside technology.

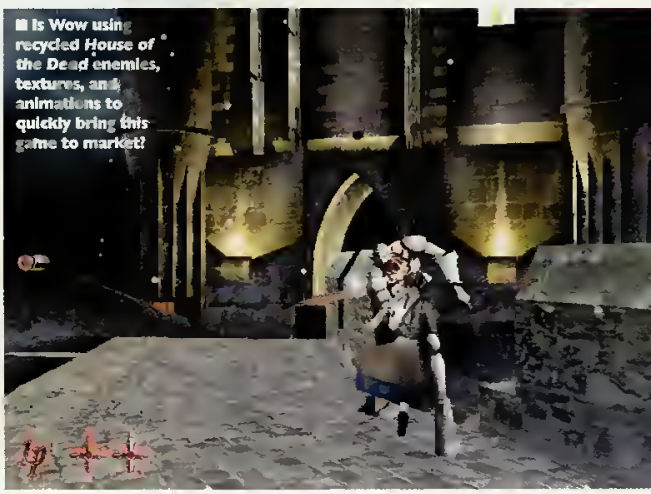


■ The Snow stage is one of six levels that make up the game

Vampire Night is a gun game, and its roots can be traced to another Wow-developed game, *House of the Dead 2*. Gamers take the role of a vampire hunter on the track of, well, a vampire. One or two players roam six stages (Snow, Stone, Fire, Dark, Water, and Moon) with the typical gun gameplay of firing at onscreen enemies and shooting offscreen to reload. Most enemies are villagers who have fallen victim to the vampire, and they can be saved by destroying a biological entity attached to their bodies. A boss monster appears at the end of each level but can also surprise the player by appearing in the middle of a stage.

According to Wow, it has been developing this game since last summer, which raises the question of how early Sega decided to look beyond its own technology. While many industry insiders believe there will be a gap before Sega makes sense of non-Dreamcast technology, *Vampire Night*'s impressive graphics already prove that this gap may be shorter than expected.

— *Kevin Toyama/Christophe Kogotani*



■ Is Wow using recycled *House of the Dead* enemies, textures, and animations to quickly bring this game to market?

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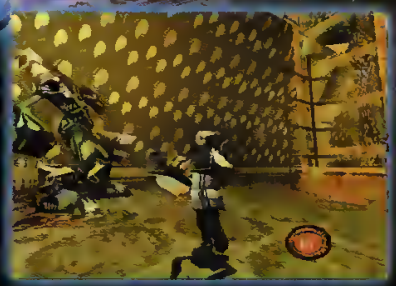

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Animated Violence
Animated Blood

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■ The streets of Dresden found in Hell create a truly oppressive environment

■ Amanda originally goes to Hell to rescue her daughter. As the story unfolds, she will discover that she's actually just a pawn in a much larger and more sinister plot

■ PLAYSTATION 2

THE LOST

■ Publisher: **Crave** ■ Developer: **Irrational Games** ■ Release Date: **Q4** ■ Origin: **US**

Irrational Games wants you to go to Hell. How you get back is up to you

The Lost begins with death. Lead character Amanda Wright's daughter has been killed in a senseless car accident, and Amanda herself has begun her own slide into suicidal depression. It's a dark precursor to the events that will shape the game to come and a solid sign that Irrational Games wants to push its game farther into the realm of real horror than the zombie-laden action-fests that have defined the genre in the past. The team is dedicated not only to bringing complex, adult-oriented storytelling to the console gaming world, but to doing it with fresh gameplay ideas that might just change the way we think about survival horror.

Amanda, who's on the verge of self-annihilation, is proffered a deal by the devil himself: If she goes into Hell and braves its nine circles, she might be able to bring her daughter back from the dead. She accepts,

■ When Amanda gets to Hell, she is able to change from her normal self (top and bottom) to an idealized warrior version (left)

but when she gets there, she gets a lot more than she bargained for. "Nothing's an accident," hints Irrational Games Project Leader Ken Levine. "Once you're down there, there's a much larger situation, and you're actually a pawn in a larger game." With the help of a crow named Virgil, Amanda discovers a way to change into an idealized warrior/avatar of herself, and then, armed and ready, she begins her real quest through the gruesome depths.

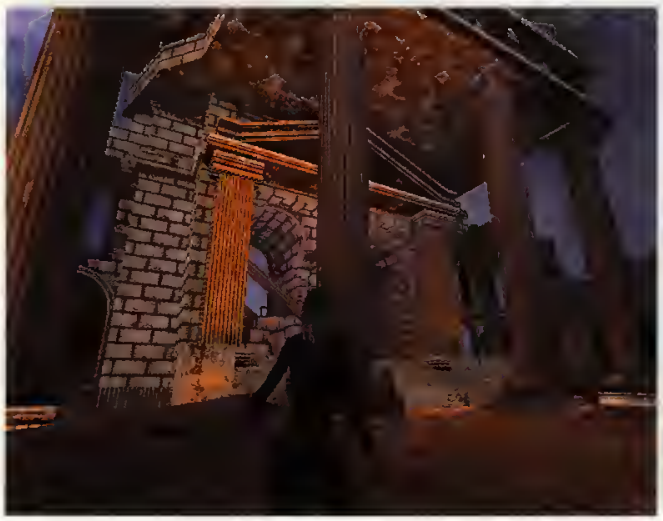
WHAT IS SURVIVAL HORROR?

The Lost may be very different from *Resident Evil*, but the team at Irrational still believes it is creating a game that can be described as "survival horror." Lead Designer Ian Vogel explains what he thinks that term means.

"It's not necessarily the environments or the camera or the camera angles, although they have become a sort of cliche," admits Vogel. "Certainly the drama is part of the aesthetic, but I think a lot of the aesthetic comes from always being shorted on resources. That's what the 'survival' part means. It's the first game type where you're consistently and very often out of ammo and health and have to survive anyway. You can set that economy in any environment you want with any technology you want."

The third-person action has a few things in common with titles like *Devil May Cry*. All characters and backgrounds are realtime, for example, and there's a mixture of hand-to-hand and ranged combat. But *The Lost* has levels of depth that survival horror games just haven't seen until now. Much of it comes from the allies that Amanda will find and absorb during her quest. Allies are acquired in multiple ways, and Amanda can morph into the different characters at any time for a small cost in Lemurs, the spiritual currency of Hell, to utilize their abilities. Each character brings with it new gameplay mechanics, unique weaknesses, and, not surprisingly, different solutions to the puzzles in the game. They each represent a different facet of the complete gameplay spectrum: Shadow is a thief who uses stealth to reach his objectives; Light is a healer who must be rescued from the clutches of the circle of ignorance; and Corruption is the rotting corpse of a mage who can not only use long-range magical attacks but can also replace his body parts with others' to gain their abilities. In fact, a lot of the game's design and eventual replayability revolves around the use of different characters to figure out unique solutions to each problem. "Our game is really about improvisation," explains Levine.

But the game isn't just puzzle solving — there's some brawn involved as well. Still, even here the game has a few twists. "A lot of what makes a horror game is that you feel extremely vulnerable," Levine says. "You're not a tank, and if you run into any combat without thinking, you're going to die." The combat all happens in realtime, complete with short- and long-range attacks and special, skill-oriented combo attacks, but you can give yourself advantages by buffing up your characters with the experience, in the form of "Lost



■ Environments in *The Lost* range from tight claustrophobic interiors to desolate, wide-open exteriors

Alphas

■ **Puzzles are approached differently depending on who you're using. Pictured here are Shadow (left), Amanda (top) and Corruption (bottom)**

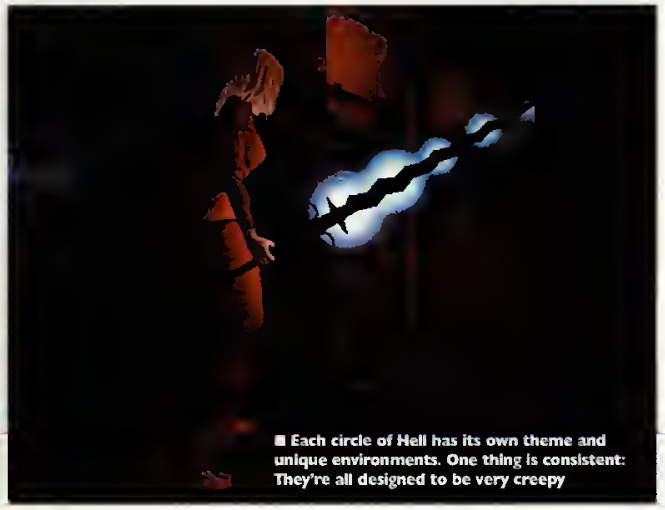
Points" that you earn, RPG-style, in the game. This adds yet another level of depth on top of the already existing framework. For example, if you've buffed out Corruption more than Amanda, you can start taking enemies out from long range. Or if Shadow is more enhanced, you may want to sneak in and try to kill enemies with a surprise backstab.

The question, however, remains: Is Hell really that scary? The version of Hell devised for *The Lost* is, mainly because the team isn't adhering to any of the common stereotypes. "We don't want to do your typical lava pit version of Hell with horned, hooved demons," explains Irrational Games Lead Designer Ian Vogel. "Each person has their own vision of Hell, and this is Amanda's vision. Within that there is some basis of reality. There's some reference there, yet it's illogical in some cases and terrifying in others."

Irrational's Hell is actually modeled after Dante's *Inferno*, with levels representing the circles of Limbo, Ignorance, Corruption, Anger, Deception, Violence, Suicide, Betrayal, and Treachery. Each level is the physical embodiment of its sin. The Corruption level, for example, is represented by a world that has been overrun with pollution, while Anger is represented by the trenches of World War I, complete with mustard gas flying overhead and grievously wounded soldiers lying on the ground crying for help. Suicide is represented by a dilapidated, Victorian-style asylum populated by damned souls. The soundtrack, while nowhere near final, already chilled us with its screaming, tormented voices and sinister whispers.

Each circle represents new challenges to overcome and parts of Amanda's psyche to explore. It's interesting to note that she isn't necessarily the "good guy" in a world where the rules are all in black and white. She got herself into all of this by attempting suicide, and she's not necessarily down in Hell to rescue the damned souls that reside within. "Amanda

■ **Amanda's primary strength lies in her close-range, hand-to-hand combat skills. Players can augment these skills throughout the game by spending the "Lost Points" they acquire**



■ Each circle of Hell has its own theme and unique environments. One thing is consistent: They're all designed to be very creepy

herself is a flawed character," admits Levine. "Her goal is not to come down and make Hell a better place. It's very personal. She wants to undo natural law. Bringing a child back from the dead might not be something that can or should happen." And while the team didn't really want to give away too many of the finer story details, we got the feeling that a good chunk of the game will not only focus on the external events going on around you, but on Amanda's personal growth as well.

All of this vision would be moot without the proper technology to back it up, and in the case of *The Lost*, Irrational has decided to work with the newly developed PS2 version of the LithTech engine. The team is keen to avoid the pitfalls of other PS2 titles by playing up what they feel is the system's true strength, polygons. "The PlayStation 2 is geared for high polygon output, but low texture memory," explains Lead Programmer Bryn Bennett. "So in places where maybe on the PC people would draw everything in, like door handles, we've modeled everything out. Amanda actually has buttons modeled on to her jacket instead of having to support it through textures." The results of this philosophy are evident in the screenshots you see here. Each environment is already intricately detailed, and the lead characters, like Amanda, are made up of some 10,000 polygons each. One of the biggest advantages of the high-poly models is the fact that the faces are fully modeled and can then be fully animated for dialogue and emotional reactions.

The biggest question about *The Lost* right now is whether or not console gamers will truly "get" what Irrational is trying to do: combine console aesthetics with a storyline that is very adult in nature. If they succeed at this goal, the final product will be a bold stride forward in console gaming, in that *The Lost* will give players something more to fear than fear itself.

— *Blake Fischer*

■ Each character will have a basic move set as well as more complicated "combo" moves that can only be pulled off with certain button/stick combinations

■ Battle, while bloodless, should prove satisfying — the AI programmer used to work for the Department of Defense

■ Individuals gain new abilities as they gain experience. High-level characters will have eight different attacks to choose from

■ PC

FIGHTING LEGENDS

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer **Maximum Charisma** ■ Release Date **November** ■ Origin: **US**

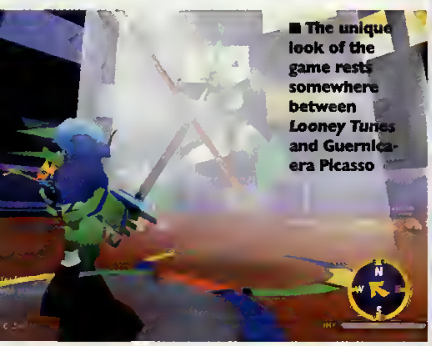
Think you've played it all? How about a cartoonish, kung fu, fantasy RTS with RPG elements in a persistent online world?

Fighting Legends is fundamentally an RTS. The trouble is, it's fundamentally an RTS in the same way that Speed Racer's Mach 5 was fundamentally a race car, and Bill Gates is fundamentally a guy who wears glasses. The initial classification simply can't convey the unique nature of the subject.

The game world itself is a strange, abstract, cartoon fantasy world filled with magic and kung fu. The player represents one of nine bizarre clans, each with its own origin and mythology, and each of which has nine basic unit types. Every unit specializes in one of five disciplines (melee, missile, magic, speed, and healing), and you can even obtain other clans' units to balance out your forces.

Online play against human opponents is a prerequisite in a modern RTS, but *Fighting Legends* breaks new ground by creating a massively multiplayer, persistent online world. Battles can involve two, three, or 20 armies, and units that survive earn experience and new talents. Additional RPG influences include NPCs, monsters, an emphasis on exploration, deep game mythology, and "meta" quests, which upon completion may result in the construction of a permanent statue commemorating your valor.

We don't really know what to make of *Fighting Legends*, as projects with this level of ambition and personality are notoriously difficult to execute. But we're nonetheless completely intrigued — we may just be witnessing the birth of a legend. — *Eric Bratcher*



■ The unique look of the game rests somewhere between *Looney Tunes* and Guernica-era Picasso

■ Each army can consist of up to 16 fighters — a number chosen to keep battle interesting but also intimate

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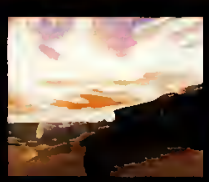
June 2001



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■ PLAYSTATION 2

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

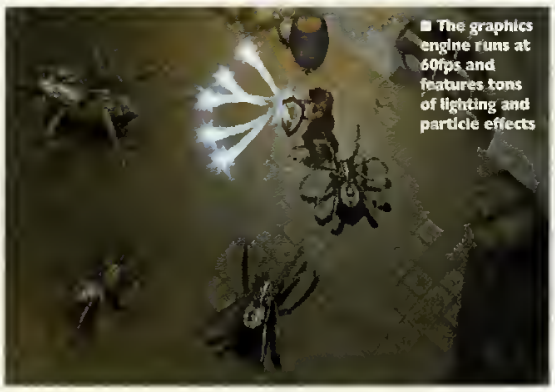
■ Publisher **Interplay (Black Isle Studios)** ■ Developer **Snowblind Studios** ■ Release Date **Fall** ■ Origin **US**

Hacking and slaying to the *AD&D* tune

Baldur's Gate has been rumored to be in production for no fewer than three consoles. The Dreamcast port of the first game, complete with online play, was canceled, and while the PlayStation version may have been only a myth, it looks like there was some credence to the mutterings about a PlayStation 2 game. Still, this isn't the same *Baldur's Gate* that we know and love — it's an all-new adventure specifically designed for consoles.

Some may be initially disappointed to hear that *Dark Alliance* actually has nothing to do with the previous *Baldur's Gate* games other than its location in the Forgotten Realms and, more specifically, in the city of Baldur's Gate. *Dark Alliance* dramatically shifts away from its PC brethren in its gameplay and is more like *Diablo* than the original *Baldur's Gate*. Combat is all in realtime, and players must fight off wave after wave of enemies with their button-mashing skills and some strategic spell use. The first level, for example, has you going into the tavern's basement to wipe out a huge rat infestation, while a later level has you taking on hordes of kobolds in the city sewers. Eventually the plot will lead the action out of the city, and players will get to explore everything from ice-capped mountains to deadly swamps.

You play as one of three heroes: a human ranger, an elven sorceress, and a dwarven warrior — each with its own play style and starting attributes. While the team has obviously foregone the use of a character creation system and turn-



■ The graphics engine runs at 60fps and features tons of lighting and particle effects

→ Alphas

■ The models in the game can have as many as 20,000 polys, which enables the developers to create some truly fantastic monsters

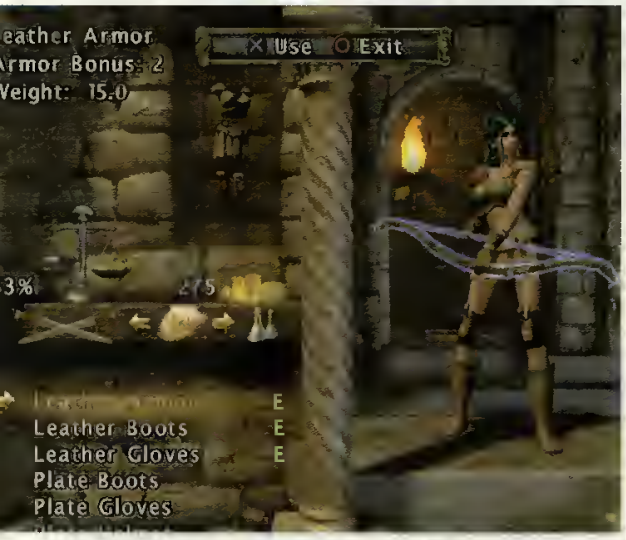
based combat, the *AD&D* third-edition rules are still very much an influence on the game; when characters level up, for example, you can choose to enhance their skills, acquire new feats (which are essentially special abilities), or learn new spells. So everybody starts the game on similar footing, but each player's experience becomes very different depending on how they focus their character growth and what items they're using. The game still retains a distinctly *AD&D* flavor, but some sacrifices were obviously made to put it into more of a console-friendly framework.

One advantage of designing the game exclusively for consoles is that the 3D technology used here is a spectacular improvement on the PC's 2D sprite-based engine. Besides keeping the action at a steady 60fps, some of the game engine's technical trickery has enhanced the roleplaying experience. For example, in one stage of the game, you're fighting displacer beasts, and the only way to tell where they are is to watch the ripples they're making in the water. Lighting and particle effects are also well done — easily matching the best we've seen on PlayStation 2 so far. The creatures and characters are all intricately detailed, with up to 20,000 polys each, and, without a doubt, this is the most graphically intensive portrayal of the *AD&D* universe ever attempted in gaming.

There may be some justification to the feeling that this is just a "dumbed down" version of the PC classic, but *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* looks like it will stand on its own with its awesome technology, proven gameplay, and *AD&D* influences. We may have to wait a bit longer for a hardcore *D&D* RPG, but this'll definitely do for now. — *Blake Fischer*

STILL NOT ONLINE

Online play for PS2 is still just a nebulous concept, so the designers of *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* have opted for the next best thing: two-player simultaneous play. Players can actually save their characters to their own memory cards, which enables them to continue on their own later or even join up with a different buddy. It isn't the same as meeting buddies online — you still have to get up and go over to someone's house — but it's the best we can ask for at this point.



■ Players will find gold on their adventures that they can then use to buy better equipment for their characters. Every piece of gear you buy will change the way your model looks, both in this menu and in the game itself

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■ XBOX

CEL DAMAGE

■ Publisher: **TBA** ■ Developer: **Pseudo Interactive** ■ Release Date: **Xbox launch** ■ Origin: **Canada**

Think *Wacky Races* with rabies

Sometimes looks can be deceiving. Take Pseudo Interactive's new title, *Cel Damage*. It combines bright and colorful, cel-shaded cartoon looks with *Twisted Metal*-style, car-combat gameplay sensibilities while still distinguishing itself from other games in either of those genres. "It's a bit of a parody on cartoon games," explains Pseudo Interactive President/Programmer David Wu. "It's not your typical younger-age stuff. It's more along the lines of *South Park* or *The Simpsons*." This demographic shift is represented well by the drivers of each vehicle. One is a *Borney*-style kids cartoon who's gone psychotic — he had to sing one too many happy-friendly songs — while another is an anime fan's fantasy, complete with bad dubbing. In fact, only one of the six initially playable characters is relatively normal — and she's a dominatrix.

These eclectic personalities will serve the drivers well, since they are actually contestants in a no-holds-barred TV show called "Dangerous Curves." "[The show is] kind of a mixture between 'American Gladiators' and WWF wrestling," admits Wu. "The primary goal of these guys is to be famous, and that means destroying your opponents and doing other cool stuff." In other words, the more people

■ Along with weapon pick-ups, there are also plenty of interactive spots in the environment that players use to their advantage

■ Even though the cel-shading gives the game a simple look, you'll still find advanced graphical effects. For example, in addition to just casting shadows on the ground, characters and vehicles are also self-shadowing

■ Our early look at *Cel Damage* suggests that the gameplay will be insanely frenetic

■ Vehicles have built-in primary weapons, but their power pales in comparison with the power-ups scattered around each level

you blow up, and the more goals (which vary depending on what game mode you're playing) you accomplish, the better your overall TV ratings. Plus, the viewing audience is also paying attention to any tricks or complicated maneuvers you pull off in the heat of battle, and these will also affect your overall popularity.

Style and story aside, this is the type of game where the actual fighting has to come first. To that end, there are over 40 weapons and items in the game that players can pick up and use, and each has its own cartoon-style effects. In our short demo of the game we spotted giant hammers, shrink rays, springs, axes, freeze rays, grenades, boxing gloves, and even a portable hole. Believe it or not, many of these weapons and items use real-world physics. So projectiles will actually bounce around the environment realistically, and when a grenade goes off, the shock wave makes the nearby trees shake.

Players can compete in three different events in each of the five arenas. The first, Smack Attack, is your standard deathmatch fare, enabling up to four players to compete splitscreen. The second mode, Road Rally, sets up a race throughout each of the levels but keeps all of the combat elements intact. The final mode is called Flag Rally, and this one could be the most chaotic of the bunch. Basically, players must gather four flags from around the level and then make it to a special ending point. The problem is that everybody's after the same flags, so the more you get, the more you make yourself a target for the other contestants.

With several months to go, it looks like Pseudo is well on its way to creating a unique and highly playable launch title for Xbox. If the game's balance is tuned to perfection, *Cel Damage* will establish itself as the game that makes us go out and buy the three extra controllers on launch day. — *Blake Fischer*

MORE THAN FOUR?

While *Cel Damage* supports four-player splitscreen play, unfortunately it won't support online battles — even though that's something the team originally considered adding. Still, Pseudo Interactive President David Wu confessed to us that the game was designed with online in mind. It won't have online support out of the box, but a downloadable patch that adds the feature is a very real option.

■ With the new third-person perspective, *Maken Shao* at least looks more exciting than the original Dreamcast version

■ You can expect the combat to be a lot heavier on the special effects as well

■ PLAYSTATION 2

MAKEN SHAO

■ Publisher: **Atlus** ■ Developer: **Atlus** ■ Release Date: **Q2 (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Atlus is trying to maken things better

The original *Maken X* for Dreamcast (**NG 07/00**) was, to put it mildly, not the greatest game ever made. But the developers at Atlus seem to have taken that game's numerous criticisms to heart and addressed at least some of them for their upcoming PlayStation 2 re-release, *Maken Shao*.

Though it would appear that most of the character assets have been pulled almost verbatim from the Dreamcast version, many, if not all, of the environments have been given a PS2 facelift. They appear a bit more detailed — which isn't difficult given the bland look on Dreamcast — and more atmospherically lit.

Most noticeable, however, is that the perspective has been shifted from first- to third-person. This could be considered a good thing for two reasons. First, it may help alleviate some of the tedium from the game's occasional platform challenges — always a problem from a first-person view. Second, and perhaps more importantly, it affects the game's central dynamic. As Maken, a disembodied brain/lifeforce, your character only exists by possessing, or "brain-jacking" other characters. In the Dreamcast version, you only saw these often striking individuals during cut scenes, but on PS2 they will be visible the entire time, showing a full range of moves.

This, in turn, should give the new version a bit more, well, *character* than we saw in the previous, somewhat soulless effort on Dreamcast. It remains to be seen whether that will be enough to actually make the game more *fun* than the original, but we have to give them credit for trying.

— Jeff Lundrigan/Christophe Kagotani

BRAIN JACK

Although in the Dreamcast version each character had different abilities, those powers were set and never changed. In the PS2 version, each character you can brain-jack now gains experience and learns new skills and moves as the game progresses

■ You'll notice that the environments and weapons are also a lot more detailed in this version

■ No word yet on exactly how the combat will work, but if the new auto-targeting system is up to snuff, it should be challenging, rather than frustrating

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■ Cael gains new powers in part by eating cows, collecting the cow souls, and bringing them to a temple to exchange for skills and breath weapons — look, we couldn't make this stuff up

■ PLAYSTATION 2

DRAGON WARS OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

■ Publisher 3DO ■ Developer 3DO ■ Release Date Fall ■ Origin US

Burn 'em. Burn 'em all...

Might and Magic fans haven't had a lot to sing about for a while, with the last notable entry being *Heroes III* — two years ago. *Dragon Wars* is a flight-based action game, and as you can probably gather from the title, dragons figure into it prominently, and one dragon in particular. 3DO Senior Director Kudo Tsunoda explains, "I've always been drawn toward dragons, but it's always the dragons who are the bad guys. I want to be the dragon."

When the orcs discover that the mana contained within dragon flesh can be used as a powerful energy source, the dragons rapidly find themselves enslaved. Dragon Cael Cyndar breaks free of bondage and sets off on a quest to free the rest of his race. And so, unlike *Drakon* or even *Ozzy's Black Skies* (see Alpha, page 18), in *Dragon Wars* you don't ride a dragon; you are the dragon. There are a 16 mission-based levels planned for the game, as you battle against orcs on land and sea, and in the air. Enemy units range from orc archers to attack balloons, and even orc mages riding other dragons.

To bring this saga to life, 3DO has had a team of programmers engaged in nothing but PlayStation 2 R&D for more than a year. As a result, Tsunoda says,

■ Welcome to the world of the dragon, Cael Cyndar — a world that's as large and open-ended as the designers at 3DO can possibly make it, and you can fly anywhere, anytime

■ The orcs have been enslaving the dragons and stealing their mana powers, but they also have a nasty habit of just trying to blow them out of the sky

■ As shown in these cut scenes, the final game will include a number of sea- and air-based battles, as well as land assaults

"The technology is really kick-ass. The rendering engine is pushing 80,000 polygons per frame, holding at a steady 60 frames per second, so we're rendering nearly 5 million polys a second. We've got full scene anti-aliasing and support for volumetric shadows, so when you swoop under a tree, you'll see the shadow being dynamically cast over the back of the dragon... really a lot of nice touches."

These "nice touches" extend to other areas as well. The terrain uses a progressive texturing method, which draws on a heavily compressed 128MB of texture data, broken up into tiles. The tiles can then be visually layered — as many as 12 deep — resulting in a unique texture for each small square of terrain, which is then seamlessly blended with those around it. The end product is a terrain that looks completely organic, with no repetition or apparent use of tiles at all.

Likewise, the designers are hoping to make each game as distinctive as possible, squeezing as much replay value as they can. Cael's power grows as the game progresses, but you can choose to level him up in one of four elemental categories (fire, water, earth, or air), each with its own unique attacks.

Further, the enemy AI is completely algorithmic and done entirely without scripting. "It's based on the environment," Tsunoda explains, "how many other units are around you, what the combined health of those units is, how much health the dragon has, what breath weapons he's using, and putting all those factors together to determine unit behavior. Our goal is to get to where, even though the level objectives will be the same, you can play a level 10 or 15 times and get different enemy behavior every time you play."

The heart of the game, though, is in controlling the dragon, and it's here that most of the effort is being concentrated. The team has worked hard to make the flight model as fun and "realistic" as possible — realistic, of course, in light of the fact that there's no such thing as a real dragon. "Yeah," Tsunoda cracks, "we were having a design meeting the other day about tuning the play control, and I was arguing with this one designer that it would be more fun if we did it this one way, and he got really upset and said, 'But that's not realistic dragon flying physics!' It got kind of ugly. It's definitely bizarre people doing bizarre things, but hopefully the end result will be a lot of fun."

— *Jeff Lundrigan*

■ In addition to his breath weapons, Cael can also make physical charges, known as Fury attacks, which include things like a tail whip, grabbing rocks and dropping them, and picking enemies up and slamming them on the ground

3DO, GOOD TO GO?

Not to put too fine a point on it, but 3DO hasn't exactly cranked out the hottest games in the past couple of years. Kudo Tsunoda, however, is adamant that the trend will change in the move to the next generation of platforms. "They're taking a real stand now on making sure the games we're putting out are high-quality games," he says. "We have a whole process set up within the company that reviews each game and decides whether they'll ship the game or they won't. It's not just a matter of, 'Can we get the game out to market this quarter?' [It's] much more about redefining 3DO as a company that makes quality titles. We've got a flexible engine with some really great technology, and we're able to build a lot of different types of games, which is pretty exciting for me. I've got artists who are like, 'If I have to build another green tank I'm gonna have to kill somebody.'"

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■ PC, XBOX

CALL OF CTHULHU – DARK CORNERS OF THE EARTH

■ Publisher **Fishtank Interactive** ■ Developer **Headfirst Productions**
■ Release Date **November** ■ Origin **UK**

Finally, a game that truly deserves to be called "Lovecraftian"

Who was the scariest writer who ever lived?

The ultimate answer lends itself to endless debate and will not be decided here. The point we want to make is this: You couldn't go wrong voting for H.P. Lovecraft. Edgar Allan Poe may be

■ Lovecraft's monsters rarely resemble anything even remotely human or logical. For instance, this nightmarish beast looks like a giant plant, until you see it has three legs and a single, glowing red eye

Alphas

■ "Shock events" are scripted scenes meant to unsettle the human player and whittle away at your computer character's sanity. This is undoubtedly one of them

■ Sometimes the scariest things are those you don't see. What's casting the shadow on the left of the screenshot above?

more famous, and you'll see more TV miniseries based on Stephen King's work, but we know a guy who got so spooked by reading Lovecraft, he kept the book face down in the trunk of his car, afraid to have it in his house. Those other guys are creepy, but Lovecraft's work is terrifying.

Hubert Chardot knew this, and when writing 1993's seminal *Alone in the Dark*, he lifted concepts like the Necronomicon, Yog-Sothoth, and The Deep Ones directly from Lovecraft's work. Thus, while Chardot defined the third-person survival horror genre, and Shinji Mikami made it a permanent console fixture, it could be well argued that Lovecraft actually invented it. And now, with *Call of Cthulhu — Dark Corners of the Earth*, he's at it again. Developer Headfirst Productions is invoking the power of Lovecraft's universe to graft the action, suspense, and first-person perspective of *System Shock 2* onto the character interaction of *Shenmue* and the multiple gameplay styles of *Deus Ex*. Will they succeed? We're almost scared to find out.

The story begins in 1920s Maryland with private eye Jack Walters, who's mysteriously stricken with amnesia. Searching

THE CTHULHU ZOO REVUE

The monstrosities in H.P. Lovecraft's work were often seen only in glimpses and described in bits and pieces, their true forms rarely revealed in all their repulsive glory until late in the story, if at all. While Headfirst Lead Designer Simon Woodroffe admits, "To be honest, some of the creatures in CoC have been modeled and remodeled many times before they started looking right," we feel that you deserve to be warned about what his definition of "right" is likely to be.

Cthulhu — A deity of the sea, with green skin, large, taloned hands and feet, and vestigial wings. Oh, and his head is described as resembling an octopus, with wide-set eyes, and writhing tentacles where his mouth should be.

The Deep Ones — These menacing amphibians look like a three-way cross between a man, a frog, and a shark (see right). When you learn their origin, you'll never eat frog's legs again (come to think of it, we already felt that way).

Hounds of Tindalos — The hounds hunt down time travelers (likely, in this case, to be you) with lethal intent, and, while vicious, they may or may not have corporeal bodies. They enter a room through corners and can be locked out only if a room contains nothing but curved surfaces.

Shub-Niggurath — This... thing was originally conceived as a goddess of alien fertility. While Woodroffe refused to describe her actual form in the game, he offered this: "You can't quite make out what she looks like, but the sound of her slurping mass and thousands of screaming mouths echoing through the metal tunnels you are in is all you need to know that you should be leaving as soon as possible."

■ These are The Deep Ones. They're trying to release Cthulhu. He's uglier than they are. You can't let this happen

for the cause of his affliction, he is led to a decaying fishing village named Innsmouth. Readers familiar with Lovecraft's chilling "The Shadow Over Innsmouth" can guess what happens next; suffice to say, Innsmouth has its share of mystery. People keep disappearing, and those who are left worship a mysterious aquatic god and display what is known as the "Innsmouth look": They rarely blink; they have unnaturally narrow heads and arched backs; and their skin is often described as dry, even scaly. Ultimately, Walters is horrified to discover The Deep Ones — a race of hideous, evil, frog/fish-men who commit atrocities in the name of Cthulhu, a grotesque ancient being of immeasurable power and evil, whom they wish to release from the sunken city of R'lyeh.

If much of this sounds both chilling and a bit ridiculous, it's only because of the game's meticulous loyalty to the nightmarish original subject matter. In Lovecraft's universe, intelligent people are often driven insane by the absurdity and intensity of the situations they encounter. In fact, this makes up one of the most intriguing elements of the game — you can literally lose your mind. Lead Designer Simon Woodroffe explains:

"If the player chooses to dabble in the dark arts, they can achieve some powerful effects — if they are prepared to pay the price. The effects are subtle at first — sounds become distorted; the character's appearance changes; behavioral shifts affect dialogue options — that sort of thing." From there, things become increasingly surreal. Most importantly, Headfirst is crafting the hallucinations to affect the player as much as they do your onscreen persona. Imagine slaughtering a hideous demon, only to realize it was just a vision, and you had actually just slain a trusted ally. Says Woodroffe: "The effects are designed to affect the player's actual state of mind rather than just gameplay. Our goal is to drive the player insane for real."

On the technical side, they have the tools to get the job done. The game makes use of the Havok physics engine, re-creating real-world physics with eerie precision. This prowess will surely surface in more typical elements — destructible crates and cars you can drive — but Woodroffe sends our imaginations reeling when he cryptically mentions, "You should see what we can do with a dead body."

Cthulhu looks good too, thanks to vertex and pixel shading, bump-mapping, dynamic shadows, and heavily layered textures. Audio effects will also play a major role, as NPCs will react not only to what they see, but what they hear.

True horror — not splatter, but the kind that plays on our primal fear of the unseen — is terribly difficult to do convincingly. But Headfirst clearly understands this fear, and Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos is the perfect subject matter. Even if *Call of Cthulhu* doesn't inspire Capcom to mimicry, we think it'll keep you up a few nights. Call us crazy. — *Eric Bratcher*

■ **Players can choose to learn magic, but sometimes the best weapon is a good, old-fashioned grenade**

■ **The "you're dead" camera view looks even spookier when you're lying in a pool of your own blood**

■ **The environments are all dynamically shadowed and feature lush, heavily layered textures**

THE LOVECRAFT CONNECTION

Lovecraft himself isn't as widely read as many of his contemporaries, and his work didn't become popular until long after his death in 1937. However, he is more widely borrowed/stolen-from than any horror writer before or since. While few artists have incorporated Poe's talking raven or King's sentient, homicidal classic car, Lovecraft is everywhere. Sam Raimi borrowed the concept of the Necronomicon for his *Evil Dead* films, and several weak attempts have been made to actually write the arcane tome. His stories often inspire music, like Metallica's "The Call of Ktulu" and "The Thing that Should Not Be" and, in fact, many of his ideas have been incorporated by actual practitioners of witchcraft and the occult. Lovecraft's ideas have inspired videogames like *Alone in the Dark*, *Shadow of the Comet*, and *Prisoner of Ice*, as well as at least one roleplaying game (also called *Call of Cthulhu*). To this day, a legion of authors continue to write stories based in the Cthulhu universe.

■ Animations are incredibly fluid, but many of them will still be very familiar to seasoned vets of the series

■ ARCADE

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **AM2** ■ Release Date: **Q4 (Japan)** ■ Origin: **Japan**

Sega revealed this beautiful beast to the gaming world at Japan's recent AOU (Amusement Operators Union) Amusement Expo, where movies of the game in motion literally took our breath away (see News, page 16). The animation is incredibly fluid, and the level of detail is fantastic; a battle between Kage and Aoi carves footprints and troughs in the snow, and another arena features a wall of aquariums, in which fish can be seen swimming. Also, early footage (especially a bout between Lau and Pai) has us wondering if some kind of dynamic blocking system is in place. *Tekken 4* and *Soul Calibur 2* have their work cut out for them.

■ Soft ground like sand and snow is realistically modeled, so the characters will deform the surfaces as they fight

■ Some fighters' musculature looks unusual at times (see Wolf's shoulders, above left) but the detail is meticulous — even the individual finger joints move

■ The Naomi 2 arcade board was designed (at Yu Suzuki's insistence, rumor has it) to be able to push 10 million polys per second with all effects on

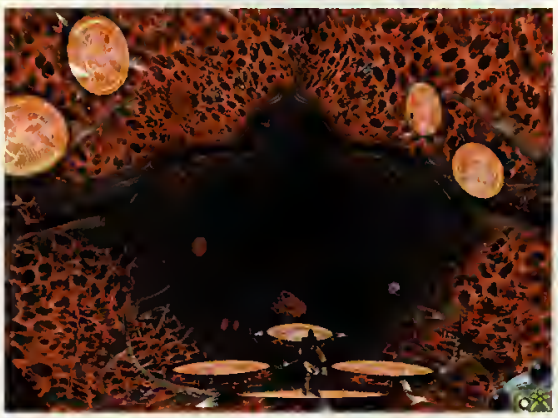
■ The GeForce3 has enabled light reflection and refraction to be computed on a per-pixel basis

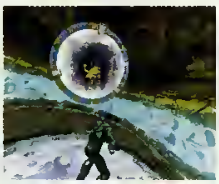
■ PC

DRONEZ

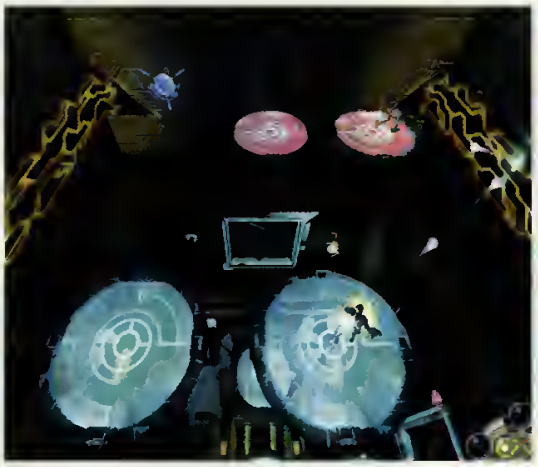
■ Publisher **TBA** ■ Developer **Zetha gameZ** ■ Release Date **TBA** ■ Origin **France**

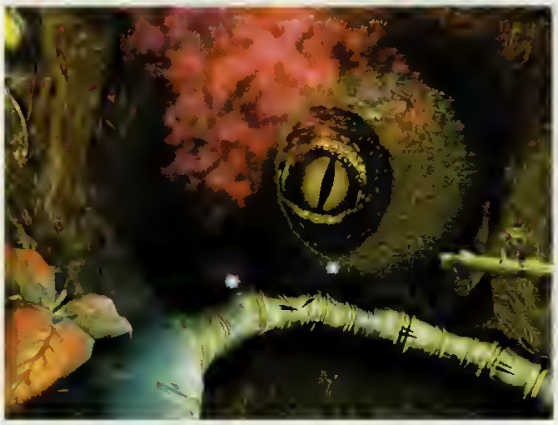
This neon-colored action game has looked good since we first saw it — back before Dreamcast launched. Zetha went underground for a while, but we kept our eyes open, revisiting the game in our Dreamcast anniversary figure (**NG 09/00**) Now, the Dreamcast version is history, but Zetha and Nvidia have revealed a lush, new GeForce3-enabled PC version. The game itself is an evolution of *Discs of Tron*, replete with circular floating platforms, projectile weapons, and a sci-fi storyline: Players take the role of hackers attempting to infiltrate secure systems by running a virtual reality gauntlet.



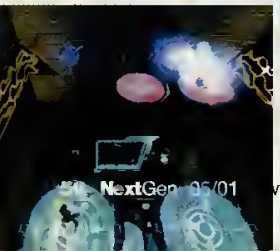


■ Different enemies will require different tactics, and power-ups and environmental hazards will also contribute to deeper gameplay





■ Environments change as you progress through the game. Some are even organic



www.DailyRadar.com

■ PLAYSTATION 2

GRAND THEFT AUTO 3

■ Publisher: **Rockstar Games** ■ Developer: **DMA Design**
■ Release Date: **September** ■ Origin: **UK**

■ The top-down 2D look of the previous games has been replaced by a full-featured 3D engine

The second installment in DMA's car-stealing series failed to recreate that special something that made the original so compelling, but thanks to new technology and a move into 3D, this latest sequel has definitely caught our attention. Gameplay actually looks remarkably similar to that of Sony Europe's near-photorealistic *The Getoway* (Alphas, **NG 12/00**) but promises to be less story-intensive, retaining the series' open-ended tendency to offer players a range of missions to choose from at any given time.

■ As in previous titles, the city bustles with pedestrians, traffic, and (unfortunately for you) police

■ PLAYSTATION 2

NBA STREET

■ Publisher: **EA Sports Big** ■ Developer: **EA Canada/NuFX**
■ Release Date: **June** ■ Origin: **Canada/US (Chicago)**

Just as *SSX* blended racing, snowboarding, and *Tony Hawk*-style stunts, EA Big's newest title reinvents Midway's *NBA Jam*, expanding on the arcade qualities that worked in *Jam* and incorporating elements from traditional basketball sims. Special moves are executed with the shoulder buttons, just like the stunts in *SSX*. The game also takes a cue from Sega's awesome *Virtua Tennis*, combining tight control with virtual athletes who are incredibly intuitive, enabling the player to execute complex, show-stopping plays almost by accident.

■ This is 3-on-3 street basketball, so don't be surprised if things get a little rough

■ What do you get when the team who gave us *SSX* decides it wants to create an *NBA Jam* killer?

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Cover Story

HOLY H

And six more Xbox launch games from Microsoft... beginning on page 65

Bungie spent over two years working to make **Halo** the best-looking game ever — then the developer threw away its graphics engine. With only seven months left before launch, can this game become the signature **Xbox** launch title **Microsoft** needs it to be?

HALO

It is going to be one hell of a race against the clock to get this game done in time

IT ALL STARTED AFTER *MYTH*, IN 1998. Some of Bungie's *Myth* team members were looking to do a project expanding on that engine, and they came up with the idea for the sci-fi-influenced *Halo*. Named for the mysterious ring-shaped world in which it is set, this game (at the time being designed for PC) put players in the role of a marooned soldier who must make his last stand against an alien race called the Covenant.

And all was proceeding steadily on the game, even after Microsoft acquired Bungie last June (see News, page 08) — that is, until the team got their hands on an Xbox dev kit last December, and that's when things got crazy.

"We had the entire *Halo* engine done, and we trashed it," says Bungie Team Leader Jason Jones. "We got rid of all the code we had been working on because what we had designed so far would've made *Halo* comparable to [a PC game instead of an Xbox game]. We literally had to throw away everything we had to take advantage of the power of Xbox."

SAME GAME, NEW PERSPECTIVES

Throughout the years that the game has been in development, the story hasn't changed. It follows your adventures as you explore *Halo* and its number of mysterious buildings enmeshed into the planet's very fabric. Ultimately, you'll learn who built them, and the purpose of the ringworld's existence. And while Jones is hesitant to reveal more of the storyline, he admits that the second half of *Halo* pits the player against enemies other than the technology-thieving Covenant.

When rebuilding the game for Xbox, Bungie opted to make a fundamental change in gameplay. The vehicular gameplay continues to be in a chase-view perspective, but when the player explores the world on foot, the game shifts to a first-person view. The team felt the PC's third-person perspective made the game feel less immersive, and admittedly, it was difficult to create a solid targeting system for the weapons.

■ Using human and alien vehicles is [illegible] a part of the *Halo* experience as the first-person shooting

■ When you're not in a vehicle, the first-person view provides a "target area" that helps keep *Halo* from getting bogged down in a twitch-fest

"Third-person works really well in *Oni*," says John Howard, lead game designer for *Halo*, "because there was a wide variety of hand-to-hand combat. But first-person is better with *Halo* because it's weapons-based and ranged-combat-based. We want you to have the level of control of a first-person action game on a PC."

But moving to first-person created its own problems, like how to keep the game moving at a fast pace. The team thought that forcing players to align the crosshairs on a particular pixel with the dual analog controls would slow the action, so they developed a "target area" that replaces the traditional crosshairs to allow about five degrees of inaccuracy. This feature keeps the FPS experience intact, but makes it a bit more forgiving. The developer has also slowed down your analog aiming when an enemy is inside your target area. Basically, once the enemy is inside that area, they become "slightly sticky," minimizing the chance that you'll overcompensate your shots.

WORLD WITHOUT END

About 60% of the game is played outdoors and in a variety of vehicles, including tanks, hovercrafts, and stolen Covenant flyers. Your crashed ship's AI is integrated into your suit, and it spells out your mission directives, basically making it the brains and you the brawn. Missions include attacking enemy outposts, rescuing human soldiers, and raiding enemy camps for vehicles or a certain piece of technology.

At certain points in the game, different allies will help you, such as the gunner riding on the back of the Warthog jeep. While splitscreen multiplayer games will enable one player to drive and the other to shoot, Bungie chose not to give the single players control of shooting responsibilities when using vehicles; instead of controlling the weapons as you drive, the CPU-controlled gunner fires for you.

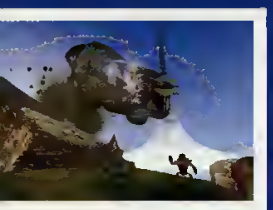
"At first, we were nervous to take the aiming and shooting role away from the player," admits Jones. "Instead we make his job to deploy it, like putting a weapon in the best spot, so as to not to let the bad guys get to cover. By making the vehicles so controllable, where the player can hit jumps and make corrections mid-air to land upright, we keeps the driver's hands full."

Halo also departs from the structure of typical action games with the mortality of your character. If you're tired of shooters with conveniently placed medical kits, you'll be happy to learn that there's no life meter in the game. Instead, players wear electronically charged battle armor that generates a shield around the player. Absorbing blasts wears down your shields, but they replenish over time without needing power packs.

That doesn't mean Bungie has eliminated all the traditional gaming clichés; players can acquire 15 different weapons, including energy-based guns used by the Covenant. The weapons available to the player don't become progressively more powerful as in *Half-Life*, but they're appropriate for different situations. Your standard assault rifle is a good, high-powered weapon, but it's not so effective against enemies with energy shields. In that case, you'd be better off picking up a Covenant weapon, though these do have a tendency to overheat over time and slow down their rate of fire. If you use a Covenant weapon in a long firefight, you may quickly find it sputtering to a stop.

"We've taken a lot of pains to make sure the weapons are interesting," says Howard. "There's a tendency to not go back to your human weapons after you pick up the alien weapons [in most games], and one thing we wanted to avoid that's a standard in first-person shooters is an escalating level of weapons where it just goes up in scale."

And it's open season on the game's five alien races. There are the aggressive Elite, which move strategically and will try to outflank your position. On the other end of the spectrum, there are the timid Grunts, which will cower and run away from



■ An exquisite physics model makes this vehicle, called the Warthog, handle with incredible realism, but be careful because you just might flip it

you unless in large groups. The different creature personalities present different challenges, and the player must figure out the best way to tackle each scene.

"The real meat and potatoes of *Halo* is the combat," explains Howard. "We think we've succeeded with our game design if, when you turn a corner and see enemies, you don't just start jamming on your fire button. We want you to stop and consider other options, like if you go up to a higher ledge you can get a better vantage point to take them out. The core of the game is the intelligent, tactical combat. Of course, you'll always be able to brute force your way through levels, but if you want to skulk through shadows and take everyone out quietly, you can do that. We want to provide a lot of options so you can do things the way you want."

MONSTER CODERS, CODING MONSTERS

When *Halo* first appeared on PC, the game's graphics created quite a buzz. The new Xbox version ups the ante with beautiful landscapes and an attention to detail, such as accurate reflections off your character's visor and scratches on his armor. Dynamic shadows move as characters move, and the sky even has a subtle heat wave map on it.

Starting from scratch enabled Bungie to eliminate the effects that low-end PC systems had on its previous code. With *Halo*'s team now more than 30 members strong (including the recent addition of the *Oni* team members who had just finished the PS2 version), the artists began building bump-maps for every single texture map, and each environment now features three or four textures layered in different ways. In the original PC version, there might have been two.

"There are so many cool graphics toys you can play with on the Xbox," says Jones. "We have this kid out of college I call the 'Little Monster,' and all he does all day is the narrowly focused stuff with the graphics. If you spend five days on tweaking the code, you can make it 10 times better."

Up to 15 Covenant creatures can be simultaneously onscreen, with each character having around 2500 polys each. An example of the real-world accuracy achieved through pixel reflection is apparent with your flashlight. Instead of just illuminating an object and fading into darkness, it reflects back a color spectrum on the edges of the beam. On a grander scale, the impressive visuals come out in onscreen action. "You can have three to five human marines helping you at once, including their support vehicles, and you can probably fight 10 to 15 Covenant creatures at the same time," says Lead Artist Marcus Lehto.

Although not in place during our visit to the Redmond, WA-based studio,

■ Bungie is working hard on AI that controls not only the Covenant creatures but allies such as the Marine gunner

■ Bungie's attention to detail can be seen not only in the reflection of the gunner's muzzle flash, but in the visor of your Marine character

different ambient sounds are planned for the game. Cavernous rooms will have the echoing effect you'd expect in real life, while other alien-created environments will reverberate a tinny sound from its walls, further drawing the player into *Halo*'s world.

RACING THE CLOCK

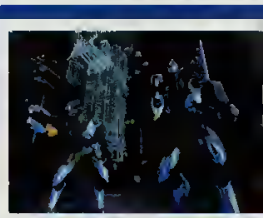
Bungie admits that dumping its PC engine and building new Xbox-optimized code slowed the progress of the game. Still, it's remarkable what they've achieved from the ground up in just a few short months, lending credit to Xbox's much ballyhooed ease of development and shorter development cycles — especially when compared to other developers who've made first-generation games for new consoles.

"I feel so sorry for the guys who worked on PS2 games," Jones says, "because they didn't have anything. For months, they didn't have more than one debug unit until three months before they were supposed to be done. We had the game running on a PC before we got the dev kits in December [2000], and it took a week and a half to convert that to Xbox. Programming for Xbox is so easy that it's almost a joke."

We're hoping, for Jones' sake, that he's right. Otherwise the joke may be on him. The demo that Bungie gave us featured one barely playable level, with placeholder sounds and only two types of enemies moving in the environment.

Halo is, according to Microsoft spokespersons, the crown jewel in Microsoft's first-party Xbox lineup, and Microsoft and Bungie admit that they have every intention of seeing it ship with the system launch. It is important to remember this is a very talented development team with years of experience, now backed by the resources and structure of Microsoft. Is it fair to expect that *Halo* will likely become one of Xbox's first real successes? Yes it is. But given the grim schedule the team faces on the road to launch, there are likely to be a few casualties on the road to *Halo*'s completion. — Kevin Toyama

■ Your assault rifle has a lot of firepower but doesn't have much impact on enemies protected by energy shields



■ Two of the game's types of enemies include the Grunts (top) and the Elite (center and above)

CODENAME: PROJECT GOTHAM

■ Publisher **Microsoft** ■ Developer **Bizarre Creations** ■ Release Date **Fall**

■ **Graphically, you sure can't fault it — check out the realtime reflection mapping on the surface of the cars**

■ **Developer Bizarre Creations knows about how to bring street-level sports car racing to a home console, and *Project Gotham* is sure to be no exception**

COMPETITION: *Gran Turismo, Sega GT*

WHY IT'S COOL: The most recent release from developer Bizarre Creations was *Metropolis Street Racer* for Dreamcast, which boasted rock-solid driving physics and impressive graphic flourish. For *Project Gotham*, they've raised the stakes, adding even more graphic eye candy, such as realtime reflection maps, plus over 20 real-world sports cars and a stunning array of more than 300 circuits set in four cities. This game should be very cool indeed.

■ The combat system is a combination of weapon-based melee and magic attacks — plus the obligatory special effects

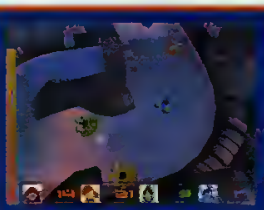
AZURIK — RISE OF PERATHIA

■ Publisher **Microsoft** ■ Developer **Adrenium Games** ■ Release Date **Fall**

COMPETITION: *Dork Cloud, Zeldo*

WHY IT'S COOL: Because it's good to have something besides racing and sports titles. A 3D action adventure, *Azurik* certainly looks impressive, set in a world called Perathia that appears to be a huge and diverse place filled with all kinds of imaginative creatures, a place in which you can move around freely with — they promise — no load times at all.

■ Although little is known about the storyline, *Azurik* already boasts an impressively detailed world

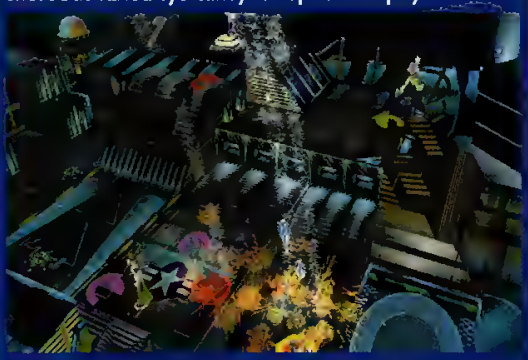


FUZION FRENZY

■ Publisher **Microsoft** ■ Developer **Blitz Games** ■ Release Date **Fall**

COMPETITION: *Mario Party, Crash Bash, Sonic Shuffle*

WHY IT'S COOL: A futuristic party game with more than 45 mini-games, *Fuzion Frenzy* appears to be an attempt to broaden Xbox's appeal beyond hardcore gamers. Thankfully, Blitz is foregoing the frustratingly slow turn-based play of *Mario Party* and should provide short but varied eye candy for up to four players.



■ *Fuzion Frenzy* hopes to deliver the fun of multiplayer competition without the annoying splitscreen display

■ *NFL2K1* and *Madden 2001* were games that defined the Dreamcast and PS2 experience — will *NFL Fever* do the same for Xbox?

NFL FEVER 2002

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Microsoft** ■ Release Date: **Fall**

COMPETITION: *Madden 2001, NFL2K1, NFL Gamedoy 2001*

WHY IT'S COOL: Every system needs a great sports game, and for Xbox, this is it. Microsoft is trying to out-Modden Modden, with players casting shadows from stadium and natural light on other players. A realistic touch will be the inclusion of momentum-based motions as players take hits.

■ Notice the reflection of the stadium off the player's helmet

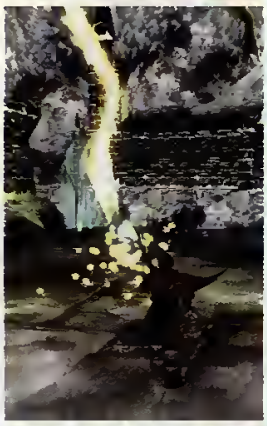
NIGHTCASTER

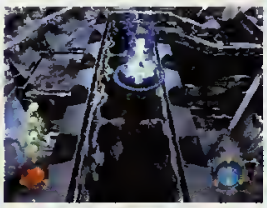
■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **VR-1 Entertainment**
■ Release Date: **Fall**

COMPETITION: *Diablo, Zeldo*

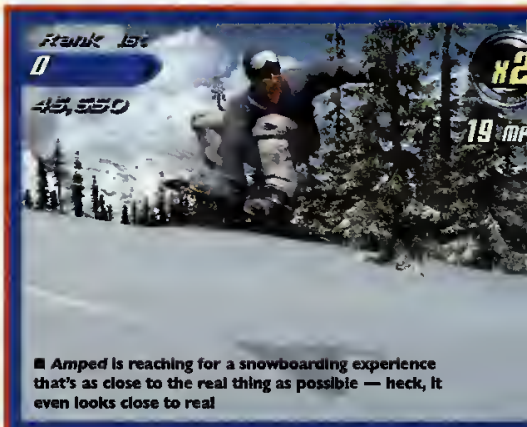
WHY IT'S COOL: *Diablo* — er, I mean *Nightcaster* — provides Xbox with an opportunity to show off its fancy dynamic lighting and particle effects through the use of more than 40 spells. This third-person, single-player adventure game will likely appeal to the hardcore PC audience as well. *Nightcaster* should be what we all expected out of *Summoner*, with a heavy dose of fantasy and more than 25 enemies and bosses to face.

■ Microsoft seems to be hitting every genre with its lineup, including the standard adventure game





■ Conjuring spells will help players rid their land of eternal darkness



■ *Amped* is reaching for a snowboarding experience that's as close to the real thing as possible — heck, it even looks close to real

AMPED: FREESTYLE SNOW-BOARDING

■ Publisher: **Microsoft** ■ Developer: **Microsoft**
■ Release Date: **Fall**

COMPETITION: *SSX, Cool Boarders, 1080° Snowboarding, X Games Pro Boarders*

WHY IT'S COOL: Though it would seem hard to top the silky-smooth gameplay of *SSX*, Microsoft hopes to wed that same sense of speed and control to a more traditional idea of realism. The game includes faithful re-creations of three real resorts, and players progress by earning "exposure" points through doing tricks in front of casual spectators and crowds. Plus, you can even throw snowballs at your competitors.

■ By doing tricks in front of as many people as possible, your exposure will push you to the top of the circuit

Believe it or not, this is a new game! This screenshot is taken from *Wormhole*, an upcoming Vectrex game created by John Dondzila, who makes new games for classic systems

NOUVEAU CLASSIC GAMING

OLD SYSTEM, NEW GAMES

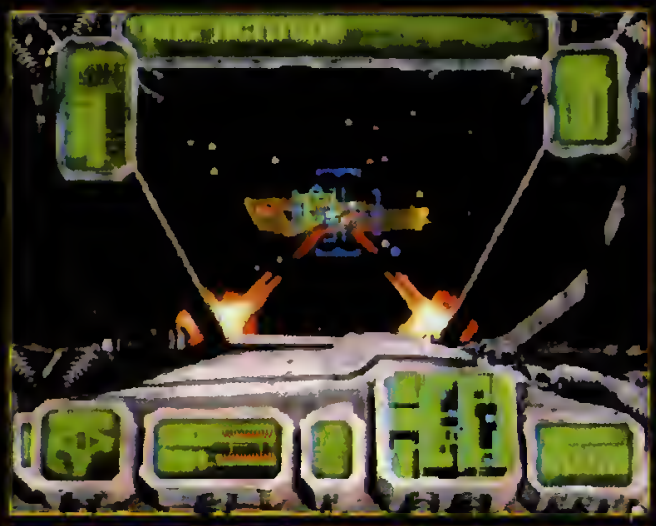
Dust off your old controllers — developers are making new games for Atari 2600, Vectrex, ColecoVision, and more

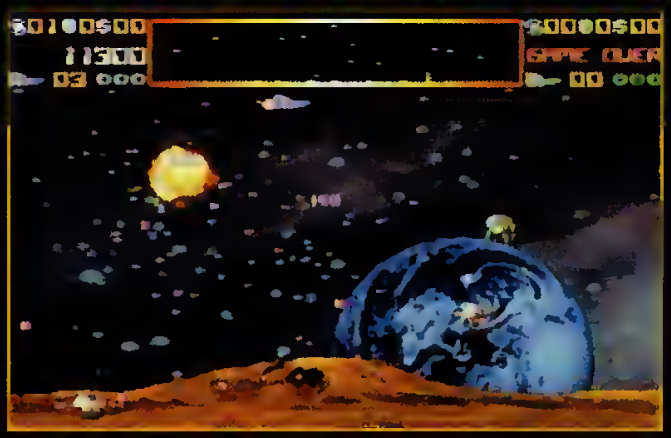
A programmer sits hunched over a keyboard, working late into the night and on weekends to finish a new game. After countless hours of tuning and de-bugging, the game is finally finished and released to an excited public that immediately eats it up. It's the same old story that's been told thousands of times, right? Wrong. Because this particular game was developed for the Vectrex, and it shipped a full 12 years after the last Vectrex game was made. Retro-revivalists are making new game for old systems, but who are they, and why do they do it?

Blame The Internet

When the Internet exploded the '90s, people who knew a little about classic systems began sharing their data by posting it on free web sites. Soon enough, the required information was available for diehards looking to create new content on systems from the age of Atari. This is how

They may look old, and they are — but these systems still have new games in the pipeline





■ (clockwise from top left) *Sky Hammer*, *HyperForce*, *Protector*, and *Soccer Kid* are all Jaguar games published well after the console's demise in 1985

John Dondzila, viewed by many classic cultists as the Miyamoto of "dead" systems, got started in 1995. Dondzila has created five new games for Vectrex, two for ColecoVision, and even a title for the Odyssey 2. Using a $20 Vectrex he stumbled upon at a flea market along with an Erasable Programmable ROM (EPROM) emulator, a cross-compiler, and a PC, he designed *Vector Voders*, the first new Vectrex game since 1983. "Vectrex has a serious cult following, and I had always wanted one," explains Dondzila. "Unfortunately, it came out around the videogame industry crash of the early '80s and was pricey at $199."

Dondzila's new games are available on his web site as .bin files that can run on a Vectrex emulator. His site is not the only one, either — if you know where to look, you can find unreleased and original titles not only for Vectrex, but for Atari 2600, ColecoVision, Jaguar, Lynx, and everything in between. (We have a list for you on page 73.) But for true retro-gamers who own a Vectrex, Dondzila suggests plunking down the $20 he charges to receive his game in cartridge form. "Playing the

"Playing the games on an emulator just isn't the same as playing them on the original console." — John Dondzila, programmer

■ John Dondzila often spends late nights in his home workshop tinkering with videogames

■ 4Play/ScatoLogic's *BattleSphere* shipped in 2000, and is considered one of the best Jaguar games ever published

games on an emulator just isn't the same as playing them on the original console," he sighs.

Dondzila isn't alone in making Vectrex games, and although he made *AMOK!* for the Odyssey 2, don't expect to find a lot of new content for obscure consoles. Sean Kelly, co-organizer of the Classic Games Expo being held again this year Aug. 11-12 in Las Vegas, thinks the interest in making games for specific consoles is a result of a direct reflection of those systems' popularity and ease of development.

"People are interested in programming games for the systems they had as kids," Kelly says. "The one system that contradicts this rule is Vectrex. The Vectrex is the system that everyone thought was cool but never got a chance to buy because it was only on the market for about a year. Programming will probably be limited to the systems that came out in that late '70s to early '80s period because programming for a system like the Sega Genesis is out of a hobbyist's league. Back in the '80s, an Atari 2600 game could be made by one person in about four months."

Out of the Basement

Although most new games for old systems come from hobbyists with a garage or basement full of old systems and cartridges, some professionally developed games are also being put out. Some previously completed but unreleased titles have recently been resurrected and published for 1989's Atari Lynx and 1993's Atari Jaguar, thanks to Songbird Productions Founder Carl Forhan.

"I knew Atari was getting out of the videogame business, and a lot of fans were lamenting how some eagerly anticipated games would never come out," says Forhan on why he got into the retro-game publishing business. "I tracked down some of these companies that had games that were more or less finished to see if they were willing to license them to me. At best, there're a couple of hundred active fans for Lynx and Jaguar, so it's definitely a hobby business. The licensing companies were realistic about the worth of their old games, and I told them that if they would give me their game for peanuts, I'd take care of everything else, such as publishing, manufacturing, technical support, and returns."

■ Carl Forhan licensed professionally programmed games for the Atari Jaguar and Lynx

"John Carmack offered to send me the dev kit [used to make *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* on the Jaguar] because he felt it was a waste for the hardware to gather dust on his shelves."

— Carl Forhan, founder, Songbird Productions

An engineer during the day, Forhan has published four never-before-released Jaguar games and five Lynx games, including three he programmed himself. As most of the games he's licensed were finished products, he created manuals and packaging, and made them available "so other people could enjoy them."

Forhan is genuinely enthusiastic about his goal of sharing his unearthed gems with other Atari fans. Talking about classic systems

■ New Vectrex games are an international affair; Kristof Tuts is making *Vector Patrol* in Belgium

BIG BUSINESS

■ *Hyperdrome* is a new, original game published for Lynx

Telegames (www.telegames.com) has made a business of selling classic-era games for years. More than 20 years after the debut of the Atari 2600, Telegames still sells consoles and games for that platform, as well as ColecoVision, Coleco Adam, Atari Lynx, Atari Jaguar, and other systems.

Telegames is a dominant player in this market space with few competitors, and takes a larger slice of an admittedly small pie. And although the advent of eBay has provided a marketplace for old titles and systems, Telegames dismisses the service as a serious threat.

"eBay's actually driven some customers to us," explains company President Terry Grantham. "When consumers see a game that's been sitting in someone's attic for 18 years going for $17 on eBay, most are happy to buy a factory-fresh, in-box game from us for a few dollars more."

Next Generation researched past eBay auctions of *Pitfall 2* (Atari 2600) and found the game sold for around $20, versus a brand-new, shrink-wrapped game with manual and box for about $25 from Telegames.

Grantham has monitored the industry for almost 20 years, and he sees a cyclical pattern in retro-gaming interest. After a system is discontinued, it takes about 18 to 36 months before renewed interest sets in, accounting for the time that stores blow out inventory and the system becomes unavailable in normal retail outlets. But just because an Atari 2600 cart sold for 25 cents during its liquidation days doesn't mean they're available today at bargain-bin prices.

"Some people don't understand why we sell games close to their original cost, but they don't take into account the warehousing costs we accrued for the last 18 years," sighs Grantham. "These consumers think that since the games are old, they should be dirt-cheap, but using that logic a Model-T Ford should cost 52 cents because it's a hundred years old." — *Kevin Toyama*

■ Digital Eclipse Creative Director Mike Mika made this Atari 2600 version of *Kickman*

with old-school gamers isn't just about bits and bytes, but about a common, shared experience from their childhood. This nostalgic bond, as well as Forhan's sincerity, are the reasons that companies such as id Software have been so forthcoming with their time and resources. In fact, id gave Forhan the company's original Jaguar dev kit that was used to make *Wolfenstein* and *Doom*.

"I was talking to John Carmack about licensing the *Doom* source code so I could make a sequel on the Jaguar," Forhan explains, "and he offered to send me the dev kit because he felt it was a waste for the hardware to gather dust on his shelves. It was very generous of him, and that friendliness has been a recurring theme in most of my experiences with game industry people. Whether I'm talking to id, Rebellion (*Aliens vs. Predator* on Jaguar), or any of the other guys, they're willing to make a deal for next to nothing. I can't offer much other than a small sum of money and a few free copies of the game, but they show me there are still gamers at these companies that are willing to license these games so other people can enjoy them. That's been a neat experience, dealing with these companies that make millions of dollars but are willing to spend time with me, a guy who's happy if he sells 200 copies of a game."

The Zen of Programming

Beyond part-timers such as Forhan, there are some full-time game developers creating their own nouveaux classics. Digital Eclipse Creative Director Mike Mika is nearing completion on an Atari 2600 version of *Kickmon*, featuring a rather blocky yet familiar unicycle-riding clown circa 1981. Why would a professional game designer that works on today's cutting-edge platforms want to limit himself to a game that runs on a mere 4K of memory?

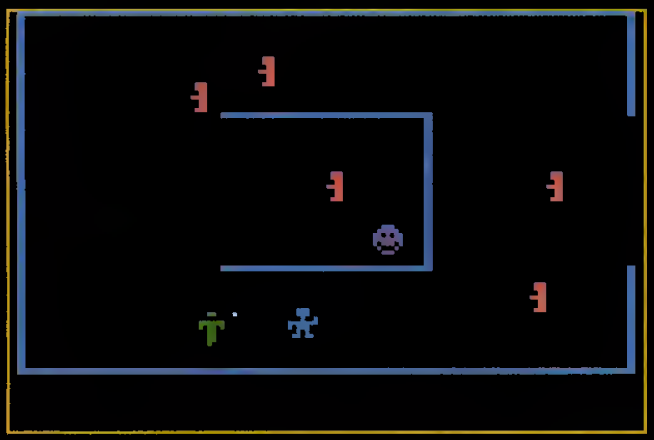
"While I create my own games on modern consoles for a living, there's a kind of Zen to working within the confines of the 2600 architecture," explains Mika. "It makes you a better programmer and gives you a better understanding of design. People interested in getting into 2600 programming shouldn't expect to make a fortune on their work — you've got to do it purely for the love of the machine."

Mika thinks Atari 2600 still holds up pretty well 24 years after the system's 1977 launch. "The 2600 was a fast system," he adds, "and it had to be, in order to modify the display in realtime." For those interested in programming their own Atari 2600 games, Mika suggests a quick search on the Internet for

"While I create my own games on modern consoles for a living, there's a kind of Zen to working within the confines of the 2600 architecture. It makes you a better programmer and gives you a better understanding of design."

— Mike Mika, creative director, Digital Eclipse

■ New games are coming out in cartridge form for the Atari 2600, ColecoVision, and Jaguar, but Intellivision ROMs are no longer burned



■ *AMOK!* (left) was the first new game for Odyssey in 15 years, and *Vector Voders* (right) was the first new Vectrex game in 12 years

"I really don't think Sony would get mad if you made *Crash Bandicoot* on the 2600, because it's pretty much impossible that anyone would be able to recognize it."

— Mike Mika, creative director, Digital Eclipse

extensive documentation and all the data and software you'd need. And there's even more help on the way: Digital Eclipse Producer Chris Charla (yes, the same former **Next Gen** editor) and Mika are co-authoring a "2600 for Dummies"-style book, teaching a casual programmer how to design, program, and produce a working 2600 cartridge.

Keys to the Classic Kingdom

Fortunately for the retro-revivalists, the videogame community has evolved to a point where most of the older systems have become public domain. In 1999, Hasbro made developing and publishing Jaguar games open to anyone interested in pursuing this dream. And although no formal announcements were made, Songbird's Forhan was told that the same freedoms would be allowed for Lynx. There's little money to be made with decades-old technology, and many of the original engineers of these systems are happy that someone's keeping their consoles alive. And fortunately for the garage operations, it would probably cost the original patent holders like Hasbro more money in legal fees if they sued for copyright infringement.

"There aren't any issues regarding copyrights if you make original games, but you need to license properties if you intend to remake classic arcade games," advises Digital Eclipse's Mika. "On the other hand, I really don't think Sony would get mad if you made Crosh Bondicoot on the 2600, because it's pretty much impossible that anyone would be able to recognize it."

One way to make a retro-game is to buy the rights to the system itself, as Intellivision Productions President Keith Robinson did along with some partners in 1997. A former Intellivision programmer responsible for *TRON Solor Soiler*, Robinson spent months tracking down Terry Valeski, who held the Intellivision copyrights, and acquired them for "more than $10,000, but less than $100,000." What he physically acquired for that lump of cash was, well, nothing. Valeski didn't have boxes of documentation or disks of code, but Robinson and his new company now owned the licenses and were able to find old source code through friends and business acquaintances. The end result was the publication of several previously unreleased Intellivision games — *Swordfight* and *Seo Bottle*, which were redesigned for the Atari 2600, and *Steomroller*, which was reprogrammed for ColecoVision. While these titles were originally for the Intellivision system, Robinson has no plans to release them on Intellivision cartridges.

"The Intellivision cartridge technology that was used back then just doesn't work anymore," explains Robinson. "The company that produced the original ROMs had them custom made in Arizona by Texas Instruments, and when we contacted TI, they had destroyed all the dies years before. They said they'd consider making the ROMs again if we ordered 100,000, but that's impossible in light of today's Intellivision market. The sad truth is that as each year goes by, there are fewer working units out there. When Activision was

■ John Dondzila made *Star Fortress* (left) and *Space Invasion* for ColecoVision because the games on which they were based never came out for the system

■ *Robot Rubble* and *Magic Carousel* are two previously unreleased Intellivision games that will be included on *Intellivision Rocks!* for PC

"[Texas Instruments] said they'd consider making the ROMs again if we ordered 100,000, but that's impossible in light of today's Intellivision market. The sad truth is that as each year goes by, there are fewer working units out there." — Keith Robinson, president, Intellivision Productions

developing our *Intellivision Lives!* compilation for PlayStation, they burned out six Intellivisions, and those burnt-out chips aren't made anymore. People keep cannibalizing machines to keep them going, but there's a finite supply out there."

To perpetuate classic and unreleased games, Intellivision Productions creates emulated versions for PC, Mac, and Game Boy Color. "It's really sad when people's work can't be played because these systems aren't around anymore," says Robinson. "That's why our main business is emulation, so that with every new generation of gamers, these games won't get lost."

But Are They Fun?

So are these new games enough to make you seek out a classic system, and hook up that old RF switch box? If you aren't already into retro-gaming, it's unlikely. Most of the newly released games are homebrew versions of *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, or other classic games, and the majority have been created by amateur programmers out of love for their old systems. These games are still, for the most part, created with the same technical constraints the original developers faced, so the last thing players should expect is *Resident Evil 2* or *Skies of Arcadia*.

"The NES was an incremental step above Intellivision, but the consoles we have today are so far advanced that they deliver a completely different experience," offers Intellivision Productions' Robinson. "The simple, addictive games of Intellivision appeal to a different mindset, and people are starting to realize that." He adds, "We all like our big battles and fancy graphics, but sometimes we want to play a classic."

Robinson is absolutely right. If you can remember the thrill of dropping a new cartridge into your Atari 2600, ColecoVision, etc., these new games just may pump new life into your old console — and if you let them, into you. — Kevin Toyomo

■ *Rockoroids* for Vectrex came out in 1996 in a compilation with *Spike's Water Balloons*, *More Invaders!*, and *Vectrex Blocks*

CLASSIC GAME RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Classic Gaming Expo, the upcoming show for old systems and games
www.cgexpo.com

Classic Gaming, home of emulation developers and fans of classic gaming
www.classicgaming.com

Emulation Excitement, offering emulators for everything from Vectrex to ColecoVision
www.emux.com

Intellivision Productions, publishing Intellivision games for other systems
www.makingit.com/intellivision/home.shtml

John Dondzila's web site, offering new Vectrex, ColecoVision, and Odyssey 2 games
www.classicgamecreations.com

Songbird Productions, publisher of new Atari Jaguar and Lynx games
http://songbird.atari.net/index.shtml

Finals

Is it ironic that the systems whose days are numbered are getting the most mature-themed games?

PlayStation2

Shadow of Destiny 76
Cookie and Cream. 77
NHL FaceOff 2001 77
Ring of Red 77
WinBack 77

■ We consider it a bonus that one of the best games we've played in a while also happens to be easy on the eyes

■ PLAYSTATION

Fear Effect 2: Retro Helix

■ Publisher: **Eidos** ■ Developer: **Kronos**

Ignore the hot chicks. This is the last great PlayStation game

The original *Fear Effect* was one of the more undeservedly neglected games of last year. An action adventure in the mold of *Resident Evil*, it had its problems: occasionally unhelpful camera perspectives, atrocious load times, and a bad habit of springing enemies on you more quickly than you could possibly react. But it also boasted a strong storyline, fascinating characters, and solid gameplay. And we're overjoyed to report that *FE2* not only maintains a firm grip on what made the original so enjoyable, but also nearly manages to eliminate the annoyances.

FE2 is, in fact, a prequel. The beautiful and deadly thief and assassin, Hana Tsu-Vachel, is notably less cold and driven than in the original, and this seems to be because of her partner at the time, a brilliant and equally beautiful hacker named Rain. Now, if you know anything about this game, or even if you've just seen a few of the ads, you're probably aware there's more than a hint here that Hana and Rain are a lesbian couple. But if you buy the game hoping for some steamy action, you'll be sorely disappointed — the nature of their relationship is practically subtextual. True,

Dreamcast

Daytona USA 78
Samba de Amigo 2000 81
Bangai-O 81
Bass Rush Dream 81
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Metal Slug X 87
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PC

Clive Barker's Undying 88
Battle of Britain 89
America 89
Age of Sail II 89
B-17 Flying Fortress 90
Kingdom Under Fire 90
Last Kingdom 90
SimCoaster 90

The Rating System

Since we're living in a time when even average games are pretty good, we at **Next Generation** will continue to demand even better. Note that a three-star rating is a typical "good" game, so expect to see a lot of them.

★★★★★ **REVOLUTIONARY**
★★★★☆ **EXCELLENT**
★★★☆☆ **GOOD**
★★☆☆☆ **FAIR**
★☆☆☆☆ **BAD**

Denotes a review of a Japanese product

A DEKE SWITCH

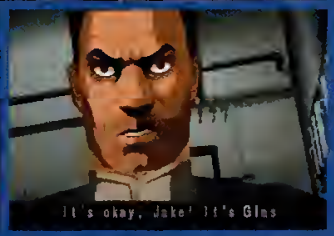
There's only one knock you can make against the game's story structure. As in the original, the action shifts between characters from time to time. The problem is that you initially spend so much time with Hana and Rain that when things finally switch to a different storyline (Deke's), it's more than a little jarring — especially given that Deke is easily the least developed, least appealing (on any level), and least well-acted character. In fact, his Aussie accent is pretty bad and plain annoying. As the game progresses these shifts in perspective happen with more regularity and it's less distracting, but that initial misstep takes a while to get over.

they're obviously close on an emotional level, even comfortably so, and when Rain is kidnapped (*groon*), Hana's intense need to get her back goes well beyond any mere concern for a friend. But while they do kiss, offscreen, it's (mostly) to distract some guards watching through a security camera. It's tough to decide whether the developers were trying to be matter of fact and not make a big deal out of it, or simply decided to keep it vague and cover themselves.

Still, as any Xeno fan can tell you, "spot the subtext" is a fun game all by itself, and this just adds to *FE2*'s other unique charms. And actually, whether you choose to believe they're lovers or not, it's just kind of nice to find a game in which two characters so obviously, deeply care about each other (although it does sort of make you wonder, and worry, what happened to Rain by the time of the original *Feor Effect*).

Indeed, all the characters are rock-solid, and most of the voice acting is equally excellent. As a result, you really get to know these people in a way you don't see much outside of RPGs. In fact, within the game, even the heroines' emphatically buxom sex appeal rarely comes across as exploitative — this does happen, but really only once. Instead, they're simply the sort who know damn well how good-looking they are, and they're confident enough in themselves to be proud of it. It's a qualitatively different and more grown-up approach than we've usually seen in a videogame (especially a console title), and again, it's quite refreshing.

But even setting aside the exceptional story and characters, *FE2* would come up a winner thanks to its equally top-notch gameplay and graphics. The pre-rendered 2D backgrounds are lush with detail, and if the 3D characters are a little blocky, they still push PlayStation to its limits, while the anime-style cel shading gives them a lot of personality.



■ You switch characters regularly, so you get to find out why Glas is such a burnout (bottom) and also get a chance to use Rain's impressive hacking skills (top)

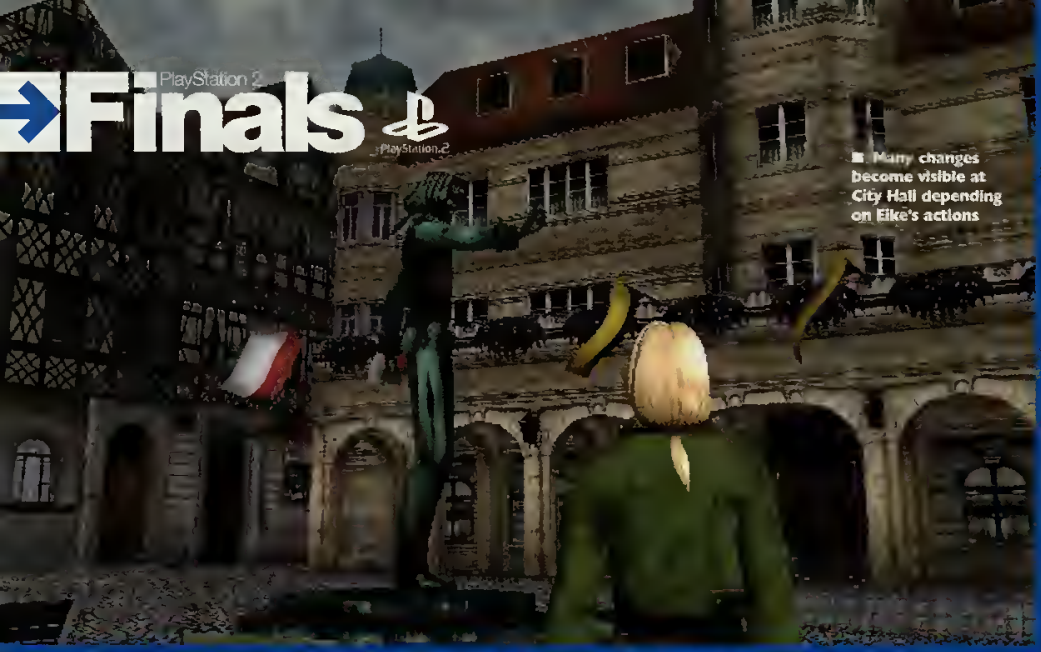
The original *Fear Effect*'s habit of springing enemies on you has been toned back a bit, and if the camera angles are still sometimes less than helpful, that's also inherent to this kind of game. In general the puzzles are less inscrutable than last time, and only one or two require outright trial and error. Best of all, there are save points scattered liberally around, and when you die, restarting is instantaneous with absolutely no load times at all. The inventory system is a bit cumbersome, using two buttons to cycle through items, but this isn't a problem unless you have to switch weapons during a fight, which you only have to do a few times throughout the game.

Depending on how good a puzzle-solver you are, the game lasts a respectable 12 to 20 hours. However, even there it keeps you guessing; although the game comes on four discs, it switches among them practically at random, so you never have any real idea how far along you are.

It's a small but telling touch, capping a game that constantly pushes in new, interesting directions. *Feor Effect 2* may well be the last great PlayStation game, but hopefully the series will go on and on. — *Jeff Lundrigon*

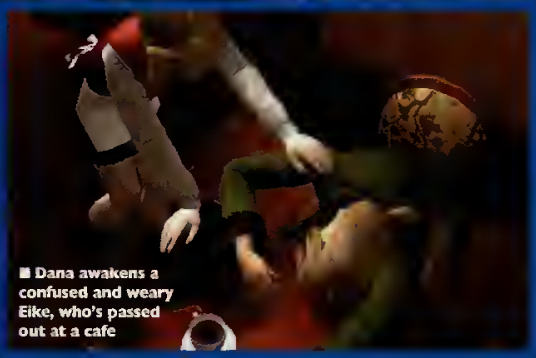
NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Everyone who's mature enough to appreciate it and owns a PlayStation should buy this. You will not be disappointed. Now, sequel please!

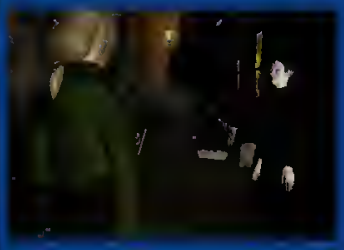


■ Many changes become visible at City Hall depending on Eike's actions

■ In one twist, Miriam Eckart is shot dead, but it's possible (maybe) to go back in time a little and save her life



■ Dana awakens a confused and weary Eike, who's passed out at a cafe



■ PLAYSTATION 2

Shadow of Destiny

■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami**

A good adventure game? On a console? Do tell!

With a few notable exceptions, adventure games haven't fared terribly well lately. Adventure games on a console, especially good ones, have been even rarer. But there's an exception to every rule, and *Shadow of Destiny* is that exception for PS2.

You play as Eike Kusch, a man who must travel through time to prevent his own death. In fact, nearly every chapter opens with Eike's death, be it a stabbing, being hit by a car, or even getting pushed off a roof. After "dying," you're transported to a purgatory of sorts where a Homunculus teaches you how to survive, if in a taunting sort of way. You're then transported back with the knowledge of how to prevent your death.

In adventure game style, this involves finding certain items, talking to certain people, and performing certain tasks at the right time. The way the story is drawn together, however, is close to perfect. While not always the best-written story, the way in which it's played out, through both character interaction and extensive cut scenes, is brilliant. The time-tripping ranges from going back just a few hours to returning to the 16th century to tie up loose ends. Every change in one period has an effect on the others, and the game rarely trips over itself.

Graphically, *Shadow of Destiny* is a very pretty game, and the cut scenes are handled within the game engine, making transitions nearly seamless. The music and voice work is mostly top-notch, and the characters are exceptionally well drawn. Although this is obviously shooting for the creepy tone of a *Silent Hill*, it never quite achieves that. But if it's not exactly scary, it's still frequently dramatic, always interesting rather than scary, and rarely if ever dull.

Sure, it's not perfect. Certain tasks are repetitive, and a few puzzles are needlessly obscure. But multiple endings add to the replayability, and the plot twist at the end is alone almost worth the price of admission. There's currently nothing quite like this on any platform, and though it's a little short, it's definitely worth the time.

— *Kevin Rice*

THE TIME MACHINE

Time travel has been a human fascination for quite some time. Perhaps the most well-known novel on this subject is, appropriately enough, *The Time Machine*. H.G. Wells' sci-fi classic features a human race separated between the cannibalistic Morlocks and their prey, the gentler but dim-witted Eloi. That's a dark view of the future indeed. Fortunately, Eike only travels to the past, which (thankfully) is cannibal-free. It's also much more convenient for Eike, as his time machine, the Digipad, fits in his pocket instead of taking up an entire room.

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Good adventure games on consoles are rare, and even if you normally don't like adventure games, this one is worth checking out. It lures players in like few others in recent memory.

■ PLAYSTATION 2

The Adventures of Cookie & Cream

■ Publisher: Agetec ■ Developer: From Software

Mmm... yummy

■ It's a splitscreen, single-player, action puzzle game — and it's really good. Who woulda thought it?

The strange and wonderful *Adventures of Cookie & Cream* splits the screen vertically and is, in fact, of two minds on its subject as well. This features the yellow bear-thing Cookie and his pink rabbit-like partner Cream as they attempt to navigate through a series of eye-bulgingly pretty worlds in an attempt to (and we're not making this up) return the moon to the Holy Moon Festival.

Cookie and Cream trek through these worlds simultaneously but are separated by a magical border. The PS2 analog sticks are used to move the wee beasties through hostile territory, and various commands can be issued via the shoulder buttons. Cooperation between the heroes is a must; though the pair do not interact with each other directly. Cookie will often be called upon to get Cream past a blockade, and vice versa. The pair will also have to work in tandem with one another, hopping up and down on a pump handle to clear a lake and the like. The puzzles here are rather simplistic (perhaps overly so), but the unique challenge of navigating these creatures through related (although separate) paths while under a harsh time limit elevates this game to a near-classic.

Each of *Cream*'s nine worlds pulses and throbs with colorful detail, and there's a manic, march-or-die sense of urgency to the proceedings. Better yet, this sugar-fed meal tops itself off with a fine multiplayer mode, and we heartily recommend gorging on it. — *Greg Orlando*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Delicious.

NHL FaceOff 2001

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: SCEA ■ Developer: Solworks/989 Sports

FaceOff has been a decent hockey series on PlayStation. In fact, it's been the only one to consistently give EA's *NHL* a run for its money. However, in the move to PS2, *FaceOff* fell off the truck somewhere between the rink and the developer's studio. The result is a game that looks and plays okay — that is, if you haven't seen EA's *NHL 2001*.

Still, *FaceOff* offers decent up-and-down-the-ice action and solid controls, including that handy icon passing for one-timers. While there are options to adjust the speed, the experience feels more arcade than sim, even in "sim" mode.

The finer touches the series is known for remain, including the ability to check players over the boards or knock the water bottle off the top of the goal. Graphically, however, this belongs in the penalty box. The player models are both blocky and flimsy, and the animation is the antithesis of smooth. The pasted-in fighting gameplay is also absolutely horrendous. In the end, this feels rushed and barely takes advantage of the PS2's power. — *Tom Russo*

■ PS2 *FaceOff* plays (and looks) an awful lot like its PlayStation forefathers

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Not terrible hockey, but it's a farm-league, rookie effort next to the polished package and graphical splendor of EA's *NHL 2001*

Ring of Red

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Konami ■ Developer: Konami

Oh, those wacky historical revisionists at Konami. In *Ring of Red*'s brave new world, diesel-powered mechs are the weapon of choice, and a motley crew of Germans, Americans, and Japanese do battle across a carved-up, post-WWII Japan.

Missions begin on a grid-based map until two opposing armies come in contact. Then it shifts to gorgeous 3D battlefields on which you execute mech attacks, send out infantry, and wreak havoc on the foe.

When the shells are flying and troops are bleeding, *ROR* hits its highest note. Although turn-based, there is a time limit per turn, lending it a surprisingly harried edge. But while there's a good deal of strategy involved here, actual player involvement is limited. When it comes time to fire a gun, the game displays a scope and then ticks off the probability of a successful hit — there's no aiming involved, and certainly no skill.

Although *ROR*'s RPG elements and quirky take on warfare are certainly worth the price of admission, in the long haul it just doesn't hold up as well it could. — *Greg Orlando*

■ The 3D battle screens are impressive at least

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: With this *Ring*, we certainly are wedded to mass destruction — yet we marry not out of love, but for looks and quick, easy fun.

WinBack

■ Platform: PlayStation 2 ■ Publisher: Koei ■ Developer: Koei

Arthritic in its stiffness, *WinBack* is a 3D shooting gallery with a story. You take control of the improbably named Jean-Luc Cougar, a member of the unfortunately named SCAT Team of elite anti-terrorists. The story involves a stolen military satellite that our group of ethnically diverse heroes must "win back."

Although the game has *Metal Gear Solid* ambitions, it plays much more like a police obstacle course, where cardboard cutouts spring into view. But in *WinBack*, those cardboard cutouts are replaced with generic 3D terrorists who simply stand in place until you shoot them.

Not surprisingly, fighting against mindless drones soon grows tedious. *WinBack* is sprinkled with boss characters every few levels, but tracking down an evil-doer named Cecil hardly provides any narrative punch. And the non-excitement isn't helped by bland graphics and boring locales.

Koei did include extras beyond the single-player game, but the multiplayer mode simply reproduces the basic fighting dynamic without the story. The basic play is so stiff and contrived, and the enemies so mindlessly robotic, ultimately this plays like a second-rate *Metal Gear Rigid*. — *Jim Preston*

■ If you like fighting around crates and other rectangular objects, *WinBack* is for you

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's a game with awkward controls and stiff action set in a boring world of boxes and bad guys. Skip it.

■ Don't expect the opponent AI to be the smartest, but the game is certainly challenging, and the collisions are on a truly epic scale

■ DREAMCAST

Daytona USA

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **Sega**

More than just a new set of wheels

While nowhere near as pretty as the Model 3-based *Daytona 2: Battle on the Edge* (and sadly missing any of that game's tracks), this "remix" of the original *Daytona USA* and the Saturn-only *Championship Circuit Edition* nails the sheer sense of speed that made the series synonymous with white-knuckle arcade racing. Locked in at a solid 60fps and boasting a surprisingly far-off draw distance with little to no pop-in whatsoever, it is, without doubt, a blisteringly fast experience. Add in the online head-to-head play, and it truly becomes unique.

The analog control, while adjustable to some degree, still warrants an oddly light touch — in fact, it's pretty twitchy. Even switching to the D-pad fails to make the game feel exactly the way arcade old-timers will remember, but it controls well enough after some practice. It does fall victim, however, to something the coin-op version, with its relatively short courses, didn't have to contend with: On longer tracks (especially the three that are exclusive to Dreamcast) you can spend a lot of time alone while making your way to the head of the pack.

All told, *Daytona USA* may not be especially deep (with only four cars) or realistic (forget licensed drivers and courses), but it delivers a well-designed racing experience that's unique on Dreamcast, online or off. If you've tired of the hardcore sims out there and just want some really good, old-fashioned arcade action, this is a solid choice. — *Randy Nelson*

■ The pastel color scheme works well, and the silky-smooth framerate really delivers an incredible sense of speed

GHOST OF A CHANCE

They say practice makes perfect, and in the case of *Daytona USA*'s network mode, Sega has given would-be stock car pros a potential leg up against online opponents. One of the game's nicer features is the ability to download a "ghost" of an online adversary's previous races and then go head-to-head against it offline, later using the experience gained to (ideally, at least) beat them online.

■ Making one's way through the pack can seem awfully lonely o

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: It's definitely not very deep, but for sheer arcade thrills, *Daytona USA* dutifully delivers.

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Bangai-O

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Conspiracy ■ Developer: Treasure

With such titles as *Gunstar Heroes*, *Axelay*, and *Contra* under its belt, Treasure is notorious for making the most addictive and enjoyable action games ever. Fortunately, *Bangai-O* is no exception, though naysayers may bash it for its outdated 16-bit look and deceptively simple old-school shooter gameplay.

■ Don't let the graphics deceive you — this is one intense shooter

You begin the first few levels in fairly easy waters, destroying a couple of enemy ships and turrets, which gives you time to get acquainted with the interface and the two unique characters. After the fifth or sixth level, though, the difficulty slowly increases, ultimately providing even the hardiest gamer with a formidable challenge.

With close to 50 stages, one might believe that *Bangai-O* would become mindless and repetitive, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Extremely original and creative level design, a variety of enemies, and numerous bosses keep things hopping. The sheer number of sprites that can litter the screen is a spectacle that no gamer will tire of, at times, there seem to be hundreds of objects moving at once. Unfortunately, there's also quite a bit of slowdown when that happens, and it temporarily throws off the pace of the game.

Bangai-O suffers from a few other problems as well. First, the story is extremely thin, unfocused, and kinda cheesy. Also, the interface doesn't feel very comfortable, and it takes at least four or five levels to get used to it.

Nevertheless, *Bangai-O*'s faults don't detract from the overall experience too much. If you're an old-school gamer or a Treasure fan, you definitely don't want to pass this up. — *Chester Barber*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you can look past the sprite-based graphics, you'll find excellent gameplay worthy of any gamer's attention.

Bass Rush Dream

■ Platform: Dreamcast ■ Publisher: Visco ■ Developer: Visco

This is obviously meant to compete directly with Sega's fantastic arcade fishing titles, *Bass Fishing* and *Marine Fishing*. But unfortunately, it just can't. It starts off promisingly enough. You have a wealth of tackle, and each of the three selectable lakes features 10 different fishing spots to choose from. Many of the textures are photorealistic, and the half dozen fishable species are beautifully modeled, so it looks good. But once you move below the surface, you'll quickly realize that this trophy lunker is really more of a big log.

■ The fish are poorly animated and the environments are dreadfully uninteresting. For that matter, so is the rest of the game

For starters, this is a purer fishing simulation than Sega's more arcade-like offerings, meaning there are fewer fish, and they're quite reluctant to strike. There's also very little to look at in the underwater environments — heck, there isn't even any music unless you have a fish on the line. Put simply, it's incredibly boring.

It might have been better if the game fully supported the fishing pole controller. Instead, while the buttons and analog stick work fine, the game only tracks the pole's vertical motion, ignoring any horizontal movements. Things fail to improve when you get a fish on the line. You simply reel it in, occasionally pointing the stick up or down as the game offers no sideways play at all. It's sad — we love fishing games, but we can't think of a single reason to own this one. — *Eric Bratcher*

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Throw it back.

■ DREAMCAST

Samba de Amigo 2000

■ Publisher: Sega ■ Developer: Sonic Team

More shake, less rattle and roll

■ The new moves add a nice new wrinkle to the already great gameplay formula, but the maraca controllers aren't quite sensitive enough to deal with dramatic movements

The original maraca-shaking music game, *Sombo de Amigo*, proved to be a **Next Gen** favorite last year, so we could hardly wait to get our hands on the sequel, which came out in Japan late last year and should make its way to the U.S. by the middle of summer. Sadly, *Sombo de Amigo 2000* appears to be more of an expansion disc than a full-fledged sequel, proving that when you add more ingredients to an already perfect mix, the result is not always something better.

■ The backgrounds are just as psychedelic as in the first game

Take, for example, a new mode, which has players waving their maracas back and forth (or around in circles) instead of just shaking them to the music in the six prescribed spots. Sure, it's a neat idea that adds some variety to an already exemplary game, but the maracas themselves aren't technically advanced enough to deal with the faster movements. This means missing moves that, in fact, you didn't miss. Other new additions include the novel, yet instantly forgettable, maraca volleyball in which players use the controllers to lob a virtual ball at each other, as well as the dating compatibility mode, which is clever but really doesn't add much life to the already great two-player experience.

Without the new moves — you can select to play the old way if you like — and modes, all we're left with is the same game as before with some new songs (including the obligatory Ricky Martin number). For many, even that much is enough to make the game a must-have, but we can't help but be somewhat disappointed as well. Future versions of the game should be more mindful of the technology on which they're based. — *Blake Fischer*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: The impact of the first game may have worn off, but it's still a blast to break out the maraca controllers and jam to Sonic Team's latest musical foray. *Samba!*

■ DREAMCAST

Fighting Vipers 2

■ Publisher: **Sega** ■ Developer: **AM2**

The armor wears thin

■ ***Fighting Vipers 2* is simply a game out of its time — too old to be exciting, too young to be nostalgic**

Three years is a long time to wait for a Sega arcade game to swim upstream to Dreamcast, and now that *Fighting Vipers 2* is finally here, it turns out the wait wasn't even worth it. The sequel to the modestly successful *Fighting Vipers* simply reproduces the same shallow fighting dynamic, with little more than the obligatory graphical updates.

Like the original, *FV2* has a few gameplay flourishes that set it apart from, but don't place it above, far superior 3D fighting games. Each of the 11 characters wears two layers of armor that can be knocked off with a dramatic flourish during combat. All the battles once again take place in cages that can be used for devastating and altogether unfair wall juggles. And blasting some poor sap through the cage walls at the end of a scrap is always satisfying.

But other than that, this is a surprisingly routine brawler with little depth. Like its predecessor, *FV2* isn't all that 3D, as there is no way to move along z-axis while fighting. Each character has a fairly large number of moves, but the delay after combos and super attacks is so short that the emphasis is on speed and constant offense rather than elaborate special moves.

The game does feature "Super K.O.s," wherein characters who have had all their armor knocked off can turn the tables on their aggressors and win in a dramatic comeback. The animations for such super moves are truly bizarre and make little or no sense, but hey, it's different.

While the characters are Model-3 board state-of-the-art circa 1997, the 3D world they fight in is ugly, and the last boss is laughable. In the final days of the Dreamcast, we were hoping better mourners than this would show up. — *Jim Preston*

■ **Some attacks are pretty bizarre, we have to admit**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Dreamcast software sales were always sluggish in Japan, and with mediocre titles like this it's not hard to see why.

Last Blade 2: Final Edition

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Aruze (Japan)** ■ Developer: **SNK**

Despite the moniker of "Final Edition," this newest SNK fighter is just a slightly enhanced port of the relatively old Neo Geo arcade game *Lost Blade 2*. At first glance, it's easy to draw comparisons to SNK's now-defunct *Samurai Shodown* series. But once you settle in and play, you'll find a clever cross between the elegant strategic play of SNK's earlier series and more modern, heavily combo-based fighters.

The fighting itself is incredibly deep, and players can even choose a particular combo system when they start the game based on power, speed, or a combination of the two.

The biggest twist is the addition of the counter button that, with the proper gamepad direction, can reverse your enemies' blows and set them up for potentially devastating combos. While the reversals aren't easy to pull off, they really help to balance the offensive and defensive portions of the game.

The graphics are the problem here, since it runs in low res and pales next to other recent 2D fighters like *Guilty Gear X*. Still, dated looks aside, the gameplay holds up well, and in a 2D fighter that's really all we can ask. — *Blake Fischer*

■ ***Last Blade 2* has a decent engine purring under the nondescript 2D hood**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A unique 2D fighter for Dreamcast, which is a welcome break from the plethora of *Street Fighter* variants we've seen in the States. Too bad you'll have to track down an import to play.

Q*Bert

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Hasbro Interactive** ■ Developer: **Pipe Dream Interactive**

Nearly everyone who ever walked into an arcade in the '80s remembers *Q*Bert*, and this latest resurrection packs a decent graphical wallop. In addition to expected visual enhancements, though, there are also new multiplayer capabilities (but no Internet play) and a new Adventure mode.

Unfortunately, the level designers went a bit too far in trying to make this challenging. Instead of the pyramid style of the classic game (which is also included), the designers went for whacked-out isometric 3D "planes," and though it looks nice, it also has a habit of obscuring the view. It's very easy to accidentally jump off an edge simply because you can't tell which direction to move.

The Classic mode is just that, and the Multiplayer mode is fun at least for a little while. Had the Adventure mode been a little more tweaked (like the great designs in *Frogger 2*, for example) and a little less irritating, this would be a good way to spend a weekend or two. As it is though, the annoying bits outweigh any fun to be had. #@!%! — *Kevin Rice*

■ **Q*Bert's back, but maybe he should have stayed away**

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

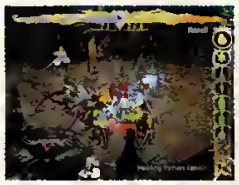
Bottom Line: It's a cutesy trip down memory lane, but the irritating Adventure mode has a bad habit of spoiling the fun.

Record of Lodoss War

■ Platform: **Dreamcast** ■ Publisher: **Conspiracy** ■ Developer: **Kadokawa Shoten**

The simple thrill of directing a powerful warrior into combat against a horde of ravenous enemies cannot easily be dismissed. It can, however, be tempered — and greatly so, as evidenced by the flawed Dreamcast RPG *Record of Lodoss War*.

Lodoss War takes its plot from a popular Japanese anime and stars a rather generic hero in his quest to restore order to the fantasy realm Marmo. Although oftentimes glorious in its scope and graphical presentation, the gameplay tends to be the weakest part of the package. Once you've built a great hero and equipped him with all the right stuff, it's possible to storm into battle and be defeated by clipping problems, which often obscure action taking place near walls. The weak camera system proves equally lethal, because it rarely offers an acceptable view. What's worse, it's possible to fight while, for example, reading a book at the same time, as you can choose to have the hero automatically swing his weapon, which then requires only the occasionally jab at a controller to drink a healing potion. — *Greg Orlando*



■ ***Record of Lodoss War* fans deserve better than this murky mess of an RPG**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Let the record show that this one could have been a great one, but it falls far short of the mark.

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■ Although the graphics may not be of PS2 quality, their unique look adds plenty of personality

■ Once again, Bowser steals the princess, and Mario must save her

■ NINTENDO 64

Paper Mario

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Nintendo**

Finally, an incredible turn-based RPG for N64

■ Hey, it's Luigi! Long time no see, fella!

It's been entirely too long since Nintendo has graced us with a solid *Mario* game, but we're happy to report that this game was well worth the wait. *Paper Mario* is a superb RPG, and a worthy sequel to one of SNES's greatest achievements.

Nearly every aspect is done to perfection, but the fighting system and story progression are *Paper Mario*'s greatest strengths. The battles are carried out in typical turn-based fashion, with tons of magic to learn, a huge list of items, and over 50 special abilities called Badges. With such a rich battle system, the combat never becomes tedious — a common problem among games of this genre.

Although the basic story is typical of most *Mario* games (Bowser steals the princess, and Mario must rescue her), all the characters are loaded with personality and extremely lovable — even Bowser. Watching Bowser's reaction as he catches the princess reading his diary is a classic moment you won't soon forget. However, even if you happen to find the main story a tad dry, *Paper Mario* smartly enhances the overall plot with an abundance of interesting side quests and fun mini-games.

The graphics and music further enhance the truly captivating atmosphere. The graphics, especially, add a unique flair to the game's personality that could seemingly be executed only in a *Mario* game: silly paper-thin characters prancing around in a 3D world. Ironically, Nintendo even makes fun of this fact, having them float like paper when they fall and stick in the ground when they land on their edges. The music, composed in typical *Mario* fashion, is as addictive and catchy as ever and even includes a few of the original *Mario* tracks.

Despite *Paper Mario*'s childish appearance, it's simply one of the best RPGs to date that no hardcore fan of the genre should miss. Give this one a chance. You won't regret it. — *Chester Barber*

THE GOOD FIGHT

The fighting in *Paper Mario* is among the most exciting aspects of the game. The progression of learning new spells and attacks and obtaining Badges keeps the battles interesting right up until the final fight with Bowser. Magic is learned in two ways. First, you can obtain spells by rescuing stars, which endow you with their power. But more importantly, by equipping Badges, Mario learns new magic as well as new attacks. So be sure to increase your Badge points the first couple of times you level up.

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: One of the best RPGs ever, and definitely the best RPG available for Nintendo 64. Even if you've only been buying games for newer systems, this is a must-buy.

■ After downing a few gallons of booze, Conker has all the ammunition he needs to extinguish these fire monsters

■ The Great Mighty Poo is probably the most obscene boss of all time, and he's also the boss with the best singing voice. His "Poo" song is hilarious

■ The bosses are pretty cool and tend to be massive in size. This *Terminator* spoof started out hiding under a giant haystack

■ Ah, the piece de *resistance*, sure to cause any fifth-grader to shoot milk out his nose — the "M" doesn't necessarily stand for "Mature" here, folks

■ NINTENDO 64

Conker's Bad Fur Day

■ Publisher: **Nintendo** ■ Developer: **Rare**

Disgusting and frustrating, but kinda fun

A new game from Rare will always cause a stir, and when it's also the raunchiest, most adult-themed cartridge ever released, the buzz is deafening. But is there a great game under all of the controversy? Er... kinda.

Technically, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* is exactly what you'd expect from Rare: top-notch graphics, incredible worlds, and that classic pick-up-and-play aesthetic. Rare even squeezed in a cartridge first: full, spoken dialogue. But the big problem here is that you're never given any kind of direction. You typically fumble from one area to the next, poking at everything until you stumble across whatever it is you're supposed to be doing. To make matters worse, the puzzles usually don't adhere to any kind of logic, so figuring them out can be a frustrating session of trial-and-error. Far too much time is spent going "huh?"

Even so, some parts of the game are brilliant, and — damn it all — you do feel compelled to keep going to see what outrageous thing happens next. There's plenty of variety, with some bizarrely creative scenarios — evidence of either sheer chutzpah or prolonged sessions of reefer madness (we're not sure which).

If you buy this just to check out the much-ballyhooed "adult" content, you won't be disappointed: You swim in poo, bounce off giant boobs like a trampoline, get drunk (a lot), take a wiz on people, and use plenty of foul language. At first it's kind of a sick thrill to hear such filth from the mouths of cute little videogame animals, but after about an hour you just get numbed to it.

In short, the good stuff is great, and the bad stuff is awful. Still, each new outrageous scenario is usually worth the irritation of getting there. — *Chris Slate*

PUT THE KIDS TO BED

Conker's Bad Fur Day has plenty of major-league gross-out moments. Seriously, during the scene where Conker must swim through a lake of diarrhea, one office onlooker started to feel physically ill. The humor tends to be very juvenile, but if that's your thing, there are plenty of laughs to be had. People buying Conker's mainly for the mature rating won't be disappointed.

NextGen ★★★☆☆

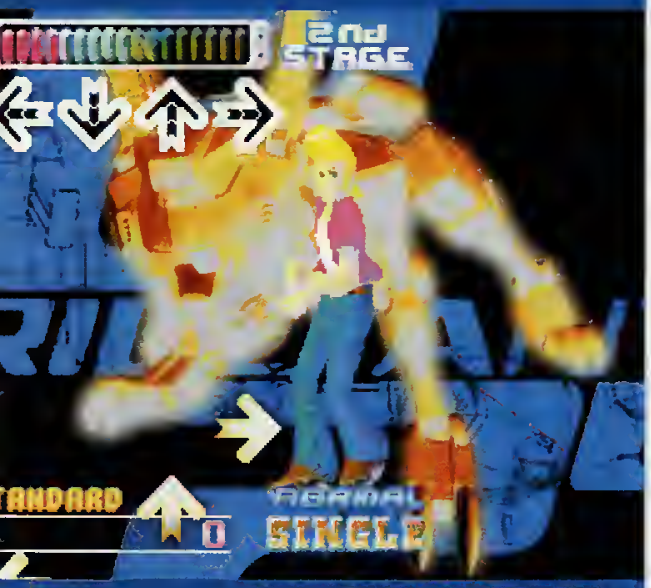
Bottom Line: If the rumored GameCube sequel can be made a little more user-friendly, Nintendo will have another solid franchise on its hands. Until then, you can take it or leave it.

■ PLAYSTATION

Dance Dance Revolution

■ Publisher: **Konami** ■ Developer: **Konami**

It's like a dance party, and everyone's invited!



■ **Not pictured here is the sight of players jumping around on the control pad**

Unless you've been living under a rock for the last year or two, you've probably at least heard of Konami's *Dance Dance Revolution*. The game is a runaway success in Japan and is quickly becoming a genuine phenomenon in arcades here in the United States as well.

What makes the game so popular? First of all, it's almost universally accessible. Anybody can pick up the basics of placing their feet on the correct squares of the dance pad to the arrows coming up the screen — we've seen everyone from kids to 30-somethings, hardcore and not, playing the game. Second, as you get better, the moves become faster and more complex, and it's here that *DDR* really shines. At higher levels, players can really show off their moves, which just looks cool, especially when two people go head-to-head. At the core of everything, though, the game is just pure fun. It's simple to learn but hard to master, and it's the kind of game that you can play with all of your friends.

Unfortunately, the U.S. version suffers from the fact that it's not really balanced towards beginners. There are only a few beginning songs to choose from, and the difficulty ramps up a little too quickly, which may discourage newcomers, as you have to play the same few songs over and over until you "get it." Still, with just a little persistence, you're sure to find that the *DDR* craze isn't a fluke but a genuinely playable new addition to the U.S. gaming market. We're hoping it gets the attention it deserves. — *Bloke Fischer*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: If you're looking for a fresh new experience with your PlayStation that's tons of fun and will make you the life of the party, this is your game. Just expect a rough learning curve.

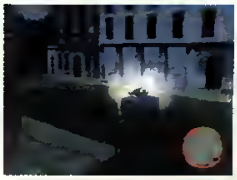
Army Men World War: Final Front

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **3DO** ■ Developer: **3DO**

In yet another patriotic effort, the green plastic soldiers once again storm into tan territory. But this comically underwhelming wartime farce merely proves that command HQ needs a reality check — it's the same damn game you've been playing for almost three years now.

The soldiers' rigor-mortis-like stiff movement and a ridiculously effortless auto-aim feature will quickly have you waving the white flag. Missions are challenging at first, but once you've memorized the enemy locations, the melee becomes a virtual shooting gallery. Visual ineptitude further compounds the problem. Crafted around an outdated 3D engine and a drab color scheme, indoor and outdoor environments alike sport a faded, unnatural decor. Explosions look decent, but dying enemies collapse like epileptic androids.

Sans even a handy save feature (progress is stored during level interludes) and any noteworthy fresh material, it's just another reason to loathe being drafted. — *Scott Steinberg*



■ **War is supposed to be hell, but *Final Front* proves it can also just plain suck**

NextGen ★★☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Like Vietnam, it's a downright ugly and vicious war you just can't win.

Darkstone

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Take 2 Interactive** ■ Developer: **Delphine**

An action-RPG hybrid ported from PC and released at a bargain price, *Darkstone* definitely has some appeal. There's a good mix of styles here and deep, malleable gameplay. The only real problem is that the premise (the land is threatened by an evil dragon) and characters (choose from warrior, mage, rogue, or cleric) are pretty generic.

The action, both combat and spells in the *Diablo* mold, is good but not outstanding. The game's real strength lies in its graphics and flexible gameplay. You're offered eight main quests randomly chosen from a pool of 22, as well as numerous subquests, and so with every new game, the worlds, monsters, and missions are different. The levels range from dungeons and castles to forests and towns, and there are hundreds of fully animated 3D NPCs and enemies.

After a while the repetitive situations and characters do tend to overshadow the mostly fun gameplay — there are only so many ways to kill a goblin — but for $9.99, you can't possibly go wrong. — *Emmett Schkloven*

■ **It's kinda plain, but *Darkstone* sure gives you a lot of replay value for your money**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: This is an addictive action RPG port, and the graphics are impressive. But if its generic elements prevent it from being a classic, the cheap entry fee still makes it worthwhile.

Metal Slug X

■ Platform: **PlayStation** ■ Publisher: **Agetec** ■ Developer: **SNK**

You can't really fault a shooter for being a bit simple-minded, and this newly revitalized Neo Geo classic sure packs an explosive, if vaguely braindead, wallop. Your choice of four lone gunmen takes on the world one bullet at a time, equipped as usual with a plethora of wicked firearms that you earn by rescuing hostages. Quick button taps produce spectacular results, with rockets, flame-thrower bursts, and shotgun shells flying in all directions.

Exotic locales such as Egypt and Japan drip with atmosphere, while hand-drawn 2D cartoon graphics highlight the unique enemies and attacks, each more outrageous than the last, that are revealed on every new level. Everything snaps along, courtesy of sharp controls and still sharper action.

Though not the most lengthy or sophisticated diversion ever to grace a TV screen, it still ranks as the equivalent of digital crack. Battles come in two flavors: fast, or furious. Provided you can handle the hyperactive pace and a body count that shames Hiroshima, it's a must-have massacre. — *Scott Steinberg*

■ **Bouncing bombs, homing missiles, and laser beams... oh my!**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A derivative but instantly endearing military shooter that earns its stripes.

WHAT'S BARKER'S STORY?

Clive Barker, probably best known for his six-volume *Books of Blood* series and the *Hellraiser* movies, contributed the storyline for *Undying*. The game takes place in the '20s and tells the tale of Patrick Galloway, a WWI veteran who now spends his time fighting supernatural fiends. Summoned to the mansion of a friend, he finds the Covenant family has been murdered and now haunts the area. While the character of an unwilling psychic investigator echoes Barker's movie *Lord of Illusions*, the rest of the chills are surprisingly run-of-the-mill (vampires, werewolves, and walking skeletons) and not really up to Barker's more creative and unusual standards.

■ Some of the enemies are incredibly vicious

■ The graphics are easily the game's best feature

■ PC

Clive Barker's Undying

■ Publisher: **EA Games** ■ Developer: **Dreamworks Interactive**

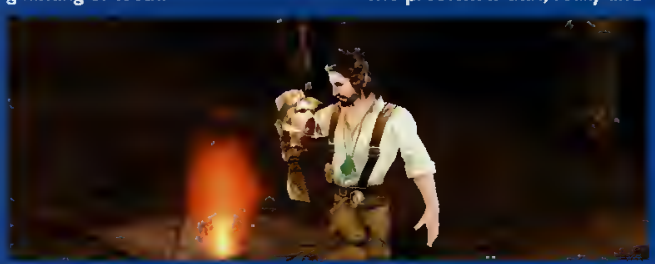
Vampires and werewolves and skeletons — oh my!

And it came to pass that in the post-*Half-Life* world, every first-person shooter would have a story that mattered. *Undying* heard the call, picked up a suitably creepy storyline from Clive Barker, and everything was good. Then, a couple of hours into the game, the story all but disappeared, and in the darkness there was much lamenting and gnashing of teeth.

Undying actually has a lot going for it. The graphics are rather striking — many of the characters are startlingly real — while the framerate is rock-solid and the control is snappy, thanks to a well-tooled *Unreal* engine. The game also boasts quite a few genuine scares, and for a while the feeling of paranoia and dread is almost palpable.

The problem is that, really and for true, about two hours into the game, the cut scenes get fewer and farther between, leaving the story to be told by a scattering of journal entries, which can only be read by pausing the game. What's left is a fairly standard first-person shooter. The puzzles are mostly of the "find the key" variety, and while the weapons are a mixture of firearms and magic spells (both of which can be used at the same time), none of them is especially effective or even particularly noteworthy.

This is a shame. The game practically drips atmosphere, but it does little to back it up. At one point, for example, a scrying spell will reveal the ghostly monks wandering a ruined monastery. It's creepy, but they're purely window dressing; following them doesn't reveal any clues or secrets, nor are there any dramatic scenes to watch. Add in a few other annoyances, like monsters spawning in perfectly empty rooms behind you and doors that open or lock themselves for no apparent reason, and there are times when it's difficult to keep motivated. — *Jeff Lundrigon*



NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: The production design is top-notch, and there are some good first-person thrills, but about halfway through it nearly runs out of steam.

Age of Sail II

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Talonsoft ■ Developer: Akella

If you've ached for a tall ship and a star to steer her by, you've come to the right place. Talonsoft's new *Age of Sail II* puts Horatio Hornblower wannabes at the helm of 18th-century sailing ships for realistic, realtime naval warfare.

■ **Age of Sail II shows every puffy broadside, plus the splash of missed shots**

Developed in Russia, *Age of Sail II* sweeps you back in time and propels you into historical naval battles from 1775 to 1820. You'll maneuver for position, fire murderous broadsides, and use grappling hooks to draw enemy ships closer for boarding parties. And it's all graphically gorgeous, from detailed warships under heavy sail to coastal fortresses in sunset. There are, in fact, over 2000 beautifully detailed sailing ships, with everything from speedy 12-gun British sloops to a ponderous Spanish battlewagon with more than a hundred guns.

Battles come in all sizes too, from one-on-one confrontations to huge swirling fleet melees. You control speed, course, and weapons, and manage gun crews, repair teams, and boarding parties. You may want full sail for speed, or you may prefer them semi-furled to avoid battle damage. If your sails are shredded by grapeshot, you're dead in the water.

The game is for a niche market, obviously. It can be daunting and slow at times — it takes gun crews five minutes to reload — but it is great fun. Especially if you're a naval buff, you'll love it. — *John Lee*

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Young and old salts will find their timbers shivered mightily in this seagoing extravaganza, but landlubbers may founder.

America

■ Platform: PC ■ Publisher: Data Becker ■ Developer: Data Becker

One of the most popular early writers of Westerns was, oddly enough, German writer Karl May, who littered his novels with good guys, bad guys, and saloon shoot-outs. May never once actually visited America or the old West, and it was pretty obvious in his writing.

■ **It's historically absurd and the gameplay is pretty basic, but *America* has a few charms**

Following in May's footsteps, Germany's Data Becker offers a newer Teutonic version of the Wild West in *America*, which is filled with cowboys and Indians, desperados, gun battles, and rich frontier history — well, sort of. Much of Data Becker's "history" appears to be based on old John Wayne movies. Gameplay is similar to *Age of Empires* with pioneer flavoring and the look of the Old West, and structures like the teepees and Army forts could have come off the nearest movie lot.

You tackle four campaigns and 40 missions as Indians, Mexicans, frontier settlers, or bandits. Each has its own strengths and weaknesses, some of which are laughable. Homesteaders grow food and build close to the Army. Mexicans create excellent fortresses. Desperados hang around saloons and exist on a diet of whiskey. Indians are strong on wooded land, but weak fighters on the open plains. (Oh, really? Try telling that to the Lakota Sioux.)

But it's still a kick, even if the history is skewed. Many of us grew up playing cowboys and Indians, and we're primed for covered wagons, and cavalry charges. The fun wears thin quickly enough, but the game still has its charm. Now if only the Germans could polish up their American history. — *John Lee*

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: Saddle up old Blitzkrieg! It's time for ein shootout mit der bad guys.

■ PC

Battle of Britain

■ Publisher: Empire Interactive ■ Developer: Rowan Software

The cure for summertime Blitz

■ ***Battle of Britain* is simply one of the best-looking, best-playing, and most historically accurate flight sims ever made**

In an era of lightweight arcade simulations, Rowan's *Battle of Britain* is nearly everything a dedicated flight sim junkie could wish for. A pixel-perfect re-creation of the struggle between Britain's Royal Air Force and the seemingly unstoppable Luftwaffe, this is one flight simulation that never falters when it comes to providing a realistic, exceptionally satisfying World War II experience.

■ **The cockpit view shows off painstakingly detailed interiors**

In both single- and multiplayer campaigns, Rowan has once again proven itself to be master of historical accuracy. From Germany's initial sneak attacks on British shipping lines all the way to the nightmarish devastation of the Blitz itself, the veteran developers have left no stone unturned when it comes to accurately re-creating this most spectacular chapter in the history of aerial standoffs.

Graphically, *Battle of Britain* is right up there with the best of them, providing players with lovingly detailed cockpits, atmospheric weather effects, and all the picturesque English countryside you could ever need. While the framerate does tend to bog down a little during the more intense sequences, anyone with a mid- to high-level PC will find very little to complain about here.

Rowan has managed to strike a perfect balance between realism and gameplay, capturing the same sense of aerial excitement that made its previous game, *Mig Alley*, so perfectly enthralling. While the truly hardcore may find a nit or two to pick, for the most part *Battle of Britain*'s winning combination of accurate physics, sneaky AI, and immersive visuals is more than anyone could ask for. — *Samuel Boss*

NextGen ★★★★★

Bottom Line: Detailed, beautiful, and polished to the nth degree, this is the WWII sim we've all been waiting for.

PC Finals

■ PC

SimCoaster

■ Publisher: **Electronic Arts** ■ Developer: **Bullfrog**

Simply captivating

■ **The camera is now adjustable, and can be placed high overhead or almost horizontally at ground level**

Basic gameplay remains largely unchanged in this, the third entry in Bullfrog's delightful *Theme Park* series; fundamentally, it's *SimCity* in Disneyland's clothes. But the three themes (Arabian Nights, Land of Invention, and Polar Zone) boast larger rosters of attractions, new types of employees and customers, and a much deeper business model that comes complete with needy coworkers. There are also new tools for the player, including a separate screen designed to ease coaster design.

The only significant failing of earlier entries in the series was that they gave little incentive to continue playing once you'd seen all of each park's whimsical attractions. This time, Bullfrog has given the player objectives — draining a lake, for example, or re-opening a decrepit, one-of-a-kind ride — which must be completed in order to progress through the game. This, combined with the more involving financial model, enhances both the longevity and personality of the game.

Not every new feature is necessarily an improvement. The interface somehow manages to be both comprehensive and unwieldy at the same time. Also grating is your character's email account, which, while cleverly implemented, floods you with countless unnecessary messages, hindering the flow of the game. Overall, though, *SimCoaster* is just way too much fun to be grounded by such niggling concerns. — *Eric Bratcher*

■ **All the best theme parks have rides that look like giant octopi**

NextGen ★★★★☆

Bottom Line: Like cotton candy dipped in chocolate and then sprinkled with peanuts, *SimCoaster* takes an established good thing and adds needed substance, though the ingredients don't blend perfectly.

B-17 Flying Fortress — The Mighty 8th

■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Microprose/Hasbro** ■ Developer: **Wayward Design**

Although much anticipated by the flight sim community, *B-17* finally arrives as a buggy, utterly frustrating mess. Crashes, flaws, and errors pop up at nearly every turn, giving the impression that the game was never even introduced to QA, let alone given the high-intensity testing such a complex title demands. From wildly inconsistent AI to the incredible disappearing crewmembers, there is just too much wrong with *B-17* to make any attempt at perseverance worthwhile.

This is a real shame, because underneath the mountain of flaws lies the groundwork for what could have been an excellent WWII combat sim, combining elements of roleplaying, strategy, and straight-up aerial combat. The graphics engine is gorgeous, and even the physics are impressive, capturing the Flying Fortress's lumbering gait with aplomb.

But in the end neither *B-17*'s ambitious design nor its historical pedigree can disguise the fact that this is a bug-infested, blatantly unfinished misfire that barely deserves a second look. — *Samuel Bass*

■ ***B-17* has arrived infested with gremlins**

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: Scuttled before it can even get off the runway, *B-17* is simply a betrayal of Microprose's fans.

Kingdom Under Fire

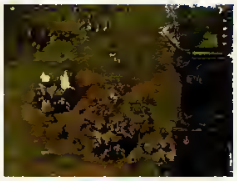
■ Platform: **PC** ■ Publisher: **Gathering of Developers** ■ Developer: **Phantagram**

Kingdom Under Fire is a queer duck. It takes a healthy dose of realtime strategy and a big dollop of dungeon-crawling RPG, weaving both into a single fantasy background.

The strategy portion is filled with the usual stuff. As always, the peasants spend their time building structures while you crank out the fighters. The animation is cool and the tactics are familiar, then a surprise comes along when, during the strategy missions, your hero winds up alone in an RPG castle or dungeon. From there you hack your way through dark corridors, collecting armor, weapons, and health potions, and you get to keep the accumulated equipment and experience when you go back to strategy missions.

However, *Kingdom* isn't all roses. The missions are far too challenging, compounded by the lack of an in-game save. You can start a mission, work a couple of hours, and then lose at the last moment. Frustrating.

There's also nothing that new here. You've seen it before in other strategy and RPG titles. But the melding of the two concepts is a noble effort, and arguably adds a lot. — *John Lee*



■ ***KUF* offers a fun blend of otherwise generic elements**

NextGen ★★★☆☆

Bottom Line: A potential treasure cruise for gamers, *Kingdom* misses the boat by a hair.

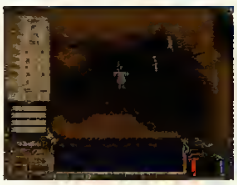
Last Kingdom

■ Platform: **PC-Online** ■ Publisher: **Netamin.com** ■ Developer: **Netamin.com**

The massively multiplayer online roleplaying (MMORPG) genre is dominated by three giants: *EverQuest*, *Ultima Online*, and Asheron's *Call*. For a newcomer to break in, the game had better offer something special. Unfortunately, *Last Kingdom* doesn't even come close. In fact, it's ugly and boring, with minimal RPG elements and unbelievably high latency even on a broadband connection.

Players spend the first four levels as peasants, all of whom are male and wear identical clothes. At level five, you can choose one of four classes (knight, swordsman, wizard, or shaman), but until you reach level 10, the only monsters you'll be able to kill are pygmies. Even after level 10, the tougher monsters are so difficult that, for the same experience points, three or four pygmies could have been killed in half the time.

In this "epic" world, only 16 NPCs even exist for things like buying and selling items or offering quests, and they're so bland you could replace them with stone pedestals and no one would notice. Finally, *Last Kingdom* is missing one vital element: roleplaying. Almost all player dialogue consists of offers to sell or auction items. Pathetic. — *Carla Harker*



■ ***Last Kingdom* is the last choice for even the most desperate online junkie**

NextGen ★☆☆☆☆

Bottom Line: It's free to try, but who'd want to pay for this mess?

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Letters

Writing off into the sunset

I must say I'm thoroughly disappointed in my PlayStation 2. Even supposedly quality titles like *The Bouncer*, which actually had the honor of being on the cover of your magazine, got two out of five stars (I won't even talk about the other games coming out of Square lately). Of the current PS2 lineup, only a handful of games are worth owning. If you own a Dreamcast, that list is further narrowed. If it weren't for future titles like *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Gran Turismo 3*, I would have sold my PS2 a long time ago. As of now, I am regretting my $300+ investment. Oh well, there's always Xbox.

William Jackson
Via email

We'd tend to agree — PS2 has been rather disappointing up until now, to say the least. However, there does appear to be some light on the horizon. As you mentioned, there are the upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *Gran Turismo 3*, as well as *Silent Hill 2*, the U.S. release of *Dark Cloud*, and, farther out, *Devil May Cry*, *The Lost*, *Drakon*, and *Final Fantasy X*, though that still seems like a small handful of titles out of the dozens that are coming for the system. Hey, look at it this way: You've already spent the money, so at least you can enjoy what quality titles are coming, right?

The article in the March issue that started on page 95 was one that I hope never to see again. I am sorry but I am very angry to see such a biased article in a magazine based on giving unbiased information to the readers. I myself am an unbiased gamer and I think that all the future systems will be great and have great games — that's why I plan on owning them all. I hate to see such biased articles in this fine magazine. I just hope that you will avoid such biased coverage again. Other than that, keep up the good work.

Sean Vermillion
Via email

Um, the "article" in question wasn't an article at all, but an advertisement for Imagine Media's upcoming Xbox magazine. Given its vague resemblance to the facing page of editorial, perhaps it should have been labeled as an advertisement. We apologize to any readers who may have mistaken this page as part of Next Gen's regular content.

I have a question about the future of the Driver videogame series. In the ending credits of Driver 2, it said that Tanner and Jones would be back. Do you have any information on this future title? If so, what platform(s) will it be for, and will Infogrames be developing this title? I can't find anything about this game anywhere yet and would appreciate any information you can give me.

Andy Vanek
Via email

There is some news, and there are also rumors of news. Currently, developer Reflections is working on a "secret" project known only as *Stunt Mon* for PS2. The rumor, apparently, is that *Stunt Mon* is serving as a test bed for the technology they plan on using for (wait for it...) *Driver 3* on PS2.

I have recently heard about Sega's plan to slowly drop Dreamcast and make games for other platforms. What will become of Sega? I am a SegaNet user, and I think it's the best Internet provider I've ever used (and I've tried them all). Are they going to bill me $150 for the online rebate? Are they going to keep making great games for Dreamcast? Help!

Adam Hofer
Via email

What will happen to Sega? It will instantly become one of the top third-party publishers on the planet, so as a company, Sega should be just fine. While Sega is going to publish for other consoles, it still plans to publish as many titles as it believes it can sell for Dreamcast, treating it as any other platform. SegaNet will continue as an ISP, independent of anything else the rest of the company is doing, and a Sega spokesperson had this to say: "We will be leveraging our networking expertise across all appropriate platforms and continue adding features to SegaNet." In other words, you're not in any danger of losing your Internet service, and SegaNet will likely be expanded to handle games from other consoles, when and if Sony and/or Microsoft ever get together a coherent online strategy. (And no, Sega doesn't want its rebate money back.) So take a breath and relax. Everything's going to be fine.

I just got my new issue of Nintendo Power today, and I must say I'm pretty fed up

CONTAGIOUS?

I just wanted to let you know that in the "Retroview" section of **NG 01/01**, under "What we were playing" you list *Twisted Metal* for PlayStation, but the picture is actually of *Quorantine*, which came out for 3DO and PC. Just wanted to let you know.

Gordon Gonzalez
Via email

Actually, you're wrong, but we can see how you might have been fooled. The *Twisted Metal* screen was unwittingly plucked from the preview we did *way* back in September '95, and so it includes some displays that were not in the final version. It does bear a passing resemblance to *Quorantine* though.

■ **Just FYI, note the difference between *Quorantine* (left) and a preview version of *Twisted Metal* (right)**

with this !@#$. I have every issue of Nintendo *Power* since it started, but this is getting ridiculous. Every cover for the past year has been *Pokemon*. Now I don't want to take anything away from *Pokemon*'s success, but I've reached a new level of intolerance for this crap. I don't know whom to blame: Nintendo *Power* for continuously covering *Pokemon* and having a monthly four-page section dedicated to it, or the N64 and Game Boy publishers who can't create a halfway decent game for either platform and make sure the magazine has nothing else to cover. I want you to publish this letter as a warning to all not to purchase Nintendo *Power*. I also want to thank you for not going *Poke*-crazy.

Mark Daigle
Via email

We feel your rage, Mark. We feel your rage.

I need a bit of help here. A while ago my friend told me that Rare was in discussions with Sony to bring a *Perfect Dork* game to PS2. Although it's likely not true, it's been nagging me in the back of my mind for quite a while. I was just wondering if you have heard anything on this?

"Nightshadow 280"
Via email

Nintendo owns a large chunk of Rare, and subsequently, just about everything Rare does is with the consent of Nintendo. Considering this nearly symbiotic relationship the two companies share, Rare would never bring an exclusive property to a Nintendo competitor. What your friend was probably alluding to was the team of *GoldenEye*/*Perfect Dork* designers who left Rare to set up a company called Free Radical Design, which developed the PS2 first-person shooter *TimeSplitters*.

In your April issue, in your review of *Phontasy Star Online*, you say it's for Dreamcast in the review, but elsewhere on the page it says it's for PlayStation 2. I know it's for Dreamcast, so why the hell did you guys list it as PS2? Were you jumping the gun on Sega games going to PS2? I know a little bit about magazine production, and my guess is someone was recycling the layout of a review of another PS2 game, and the lazy designer in question failed to change the system name.

Frank Sandbeens
Via email

Correct on both counts. The *Phontasy Star Online* review in question is for Dreamcast, and it was, in fact a template error — and one the napping editors of this magazine should have caught. After they apologized to Sega for the error, the designers and editors at fault were asked to stand in the corner for the remainder of the day.

Now that Sega has made it official that it will begin development for other systems, how will this affect the ongoing Shenmue saga? Will it stay on Dreamcast, make the move to PS2, or just die off altogether? You guys gotta fill me in! Also, does Sega or any other developer plan on making games for Dreamcast beyond 2001?

Matt Janiak
Middletown, NJ

Good questions. Shenmue will remain on Dreamcast through at least its next installment — ideally it should be out in the fall in Japan, with the U.S. release following soon after. As for the third (and reportedly final) chapter, we can only guess, but it would make sense there would at least be a Dreamcast version, even if it wound up also being released for other systems. We would further hazard that an Xbox port, while not easy, wouldn't be that difficult either since Dreamcast and Xbox share the same CPU/GPU/contiguous RAM paradigm.

As for Dreamcast titles beyond 2001, Sega will likely produce at least a few for as long as they keep selling (we've heard of *Phontasy Star Online* 2, for example), but sadly that seems to be about it. You can probably expect a few additional third-party titles — THQ, for one, owes a significant portion of its revenue to putting out games for "dead" systems — but we wouldn't hold our breath.

While I was looking over the NG 03/01 coverage of the new *Metal Gear* 2 demo you guys played, I noticed that one of the pictures showed Revolver Ocelot with his right hand. Didn't he lose his hand in the last *MGS*?

"P.C."
Via email

Well, if you look closely, you'll notice Ocelot's right "hand" is inside a glove, which makes it impossible to tell if the appendage in question is real or artificial. It should also be mentioned that although he continuously twirls a pistol with his left hand while he's onscreen, his right hand never actually moves — his arm simply raises and lowers the binoculars. We expect the mystery will be cleared up in the full version, but the simple fact is that in the demo it's an unexplained mystery, and we're as in the dark as you are.

MULLET GEAR SOLID

What genius decided to give our beloved Snake the most universally bad haircut ever invented, the mullet? Does he live in a trailer park? Has he been cryogenically frozen since 1988? I pray that we can all band together and unite to get the mullet-fetish-freak-programmer to take it back before it's too late. They might as well have put him in a clown costume! Maybe in *Metal Geor Solid 3*, he'll have a pompadour, or a beehive, or a Moe Howard bowl cut — anything would be an improvement.

Tom Carradine
Via email

I would like to commend you on your *Metal Geor Solid* 2 article. it was incredibly informative as well as captivating. In fact, while reading it on an exercise machine, I was sent into a sort of *Metal Gear* meditative trance, and I felt very at peace with myself.

Anyway, I was looking at the spectacular screenshots, as well as the beautiful cover, and one thing sort of bothered me. Solid Snake seems to have his hair fashioned into a mullet. Now, I realize that the whole mullet joke is getting old and overdone on the Web, but for that very reason I was curious as to whether or not there would be a game option to turn off Snake's mullet? Do you have to play the game through entirely to disable his mullet? Or vice versa? I feel that I won't be able to take Snake very seriously with his long hair in the back, rustling in the wind and rain. Perhaps the game will be interactive enough that he can cut it off himself with something in the environment? Thanks for your time and research.

"Random Web Entity Arius"
Via email

We at Next Gen share your concern, but we believe that Konami's choice of haircuts was deliberate. Reportedly, it was felt that something had to be done to offset the overwhelming cool of *MGS2*, or there was a danger of locking or freezing the terminally unhip PlayStation 2. It also makes the character seem more human, and an even greater hero in the Greek sense — like Hector, Oedipus, or Hercules, Snake too has a tragic flaw.

■ Maybe Snake has been hiding out so well for so many years, he simply doesn't know his hair has become a joke

Next Generation Letters,
150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane, CA 94005.
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Note: email is vastly, vastly preferred

Retroview

May 1982

The first next-generation consoles arrive, and third-party developers are vindicated

1982 was a year of tremendous significance for games. Several new consoles appeared, including the vector-only Vectrex and Atari's 5200, code-named "Pam" (the original 2600 had been "Stella," and a proto-5200 had been "Sylvia"). The 5200 was warmly received but badly designed; non-centering joysticks were an Achilles' heel, and the system failed to achieve the 2600's tremendous success. Stella, in fact, continued to sell well at a new price of $99. This was bad news for Emerson's Arcadia — its major selling points were its $99 price tag and 28k of memory (much more than both the 2600 or the Intellivision). Unfortunately, the games consistently failed to use more than 8k of this memory, and the system bombed. Another new system, the 48k ColecoVision, would achieve success, fueled in no small part by perfect ports of Sega's *Zoxxon* and Nintendo's *Donkey Kong*.

■ **Activision, publishers of the amazing *Pitfall!*, almost single-handedly established the business model for third-party developers**

Another far-reaching event happened when Activision, the console industry's original third-party developer, settled out of court with Atari, which had sued Activision over its business model. Conditions of the settlement established that royalties would be paid to Atari for every cartridge sold — a model still in use today.

What we were playing

If it wasn't an arcade port, it was probably a knock-off

■ **K.C'S CRAZY CHASE**

■ System: Odyssey 2
■ Publisher: Magnavox

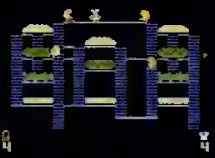
■ **MEGAMANIA**

■ System: Atari 2600
■ Publisher: Activision

■ **COSMIC ARK**

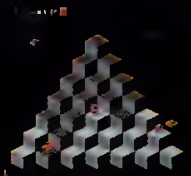
■ System: Atari 2600
■ Publisher: Imagic

■ **BURGERTIME**



■ System: Intellivision
■ Publisher: Mattel

■ **Q*BERT**



■ System: Arcade
■ Publisher: Gottlieb

Jukebox of 1982

Steve Miller Band	— "Abracadabra"
Olivia Newton-John	— "Physical"
Men at Work	— "Who Can It Be Now?"
Human League	— "Don't You Want Me?"
John Cougar	— "Jack & Diane"
Hall & Oates	— "Maneater"
Joan Jett and the Blackhearts	— "I Love Rock and Roll"
Survivor	— "Eye of the Tiger"
J. Geils Band	— "Centerfold"
Paul McCartney and Stevie Wonder	— "Ebony & Ivory"

...and in the real world

■ **Michael Jackson's landmark album *Thriller* is released in November. It has currently sold over 26 million copies and remains among the best-selling albums of all time.**

■ **Truck driver Larry Walters ties 45 weather balloons to a lawn chair and soars to an altitude of 16,000 feet (and into LAX airspace) before shooting some of the balloons with a pellet gun and descending. An FAA official tells *The New York Times*: "We know he broke some part of the Federal Aviation Act, and as soon as we decide which part it is, some type of charge will be filed." Walters was eventually fined some $1500.**

■ ***E.T.* the *Extraterrestrial* earns nearly $400 million at the box office, eclipsing even *Star Wars* to become the highest-grossing first-run film of all time (at the time). The film does, however, fail to win the Academy Award for Best Picture, which instead goes to the epic biography *Gandhi*. Disney's *Tron*, the story of a game player/programmer who gets sucked into a virtual environment, receives nominations for Best Sound and Best Costume Design (but not for Best Special Effects) and comes away empty-handed.**

■ **264,000 bottles of Extra-Strength Tylenol are recalled after several bottles are discovered to have been poisoned with cyanide. Seven deaths are attributed to the tainted tablets, triggering pharmaceutical companies to develop better tamper-resistant packaging.**

■ **The 1982/83 El Nino weather system would prove among the most severe in history. It causes trade winds to reverse direction, dumps 11 feet of rain in areas of Peru that averaged 6 inches a year, and even alters the Earth's angular momentum to the point that the length of the day increases by 0.2 milliseconds.**

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BackwardsCompatible

Still crazy, after all these traffic violations. Page 32. Sega and Namco collaborate on an arcade machine. Could *Virtuo Fighter vs. Tekken* be next? Page 34. **Okay, we know running with scissors is bad, but what about driving with a big axe? Page 47.** Think you've got every Vectrex game ever made? Think again. If you're a fan of classic game systems — any of them — turn directly to this feature. Page 68. **For those of you keeping track, this is indeed the second flying dragon game previewed this month. Planes are sooo passé. Page 50.** The final boss is really hard — he has this attack where he folds you into an origami sailor hat... Page 85. **The team who created *System Shock 2* is back, and they want you to go to Hell. Page 36.** Finally. Inarguable proof of what we've said all along — videogames are good for you. Page 7. **If the spookiest game ever conceived calls, will you dare accept the charges? Page 53.** Here's a hint: when entering the body of a gigantic undersea leviathan in order to travel into its skull and destroy its brain from the inside, try to use the front door. That back way doesn't have teeth, but there are other concerns. Page 30. **The perfect game for all of us who didn't grow up to become *Solid Gold* dancers. Page 87.** The good news: You can shoot flames from your hands. The bad news: That guy over your left shoulder isn't on your team. Page 43. **Ever wondered what corkscrew jumping looks like in first-person? Neither did we, but it seems we'll find out. Page 13.** Quite possibly the first reference to fine art in the history of **Next Gen**. It's even relevant. Page 40. **True or false? One of the most popular writers of Western stories was not only not American, but never visited America. Page 89.** How do you make a mediocre FPS better? Evidently, by changing the perspective to third-person. Page 48. **Quick — what classic science fiction novel featured a race of characters with the same name as Charles Louis Eloi Pernet, one of France's finest manufacturers of cigar cutters? Page 76.** Vicious? Hey, you can't talk about our girlfriend that way. Page 88.

NextMonth Rogue Squadron Goes GameCube

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Imagine Media, Inc.
150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane CA 94005

EDITORIAL
voice 415 468. 4684, 212.768 2956
email: ngonline@imaginemedia.com

ADVERTISING
voice 415 468. 4684 fax 415 656. 2585
email: publisher@next-generation.com

If you have questions about a subscription, please contact Customer Service
P.O. Box 53680, Boulder, CO 80322
800. 678. 3643 • custserv@next-generation.com
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Robert J. Abramson and Associates Inc.
720 Post Road, Scarsdale, New York 10583

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It was a time of Girl Scout cookies, when Blake came over to Jen's desk several times a day rattling a pack of Thin Mints. But when Jen and Mo really needed them, where were the Thin Mints? Alas there were none. But we did have MAME, and Tom decimated the high score lists on Punisher, Yie-Ar Kung Fu, Shaolin Road — not that we've seen any real evidence of these so-called "high scores" because Tom claims that his "machine got turned off." So in protest Eric Bratcher built a wall of speakers around his desk. And hey Alex C., in the U.S. we use inches, not centimeters!

BPA

imagine MEDIA WITH PASSION
150 North Hill Dr., Brisbane CA 94005
(415) 468-4684 www.imaginemedia.com

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Telephone +44 1225 442244
www.thefuturenetwork.plc.uk
Bath Munich Milan Munich New York Paris
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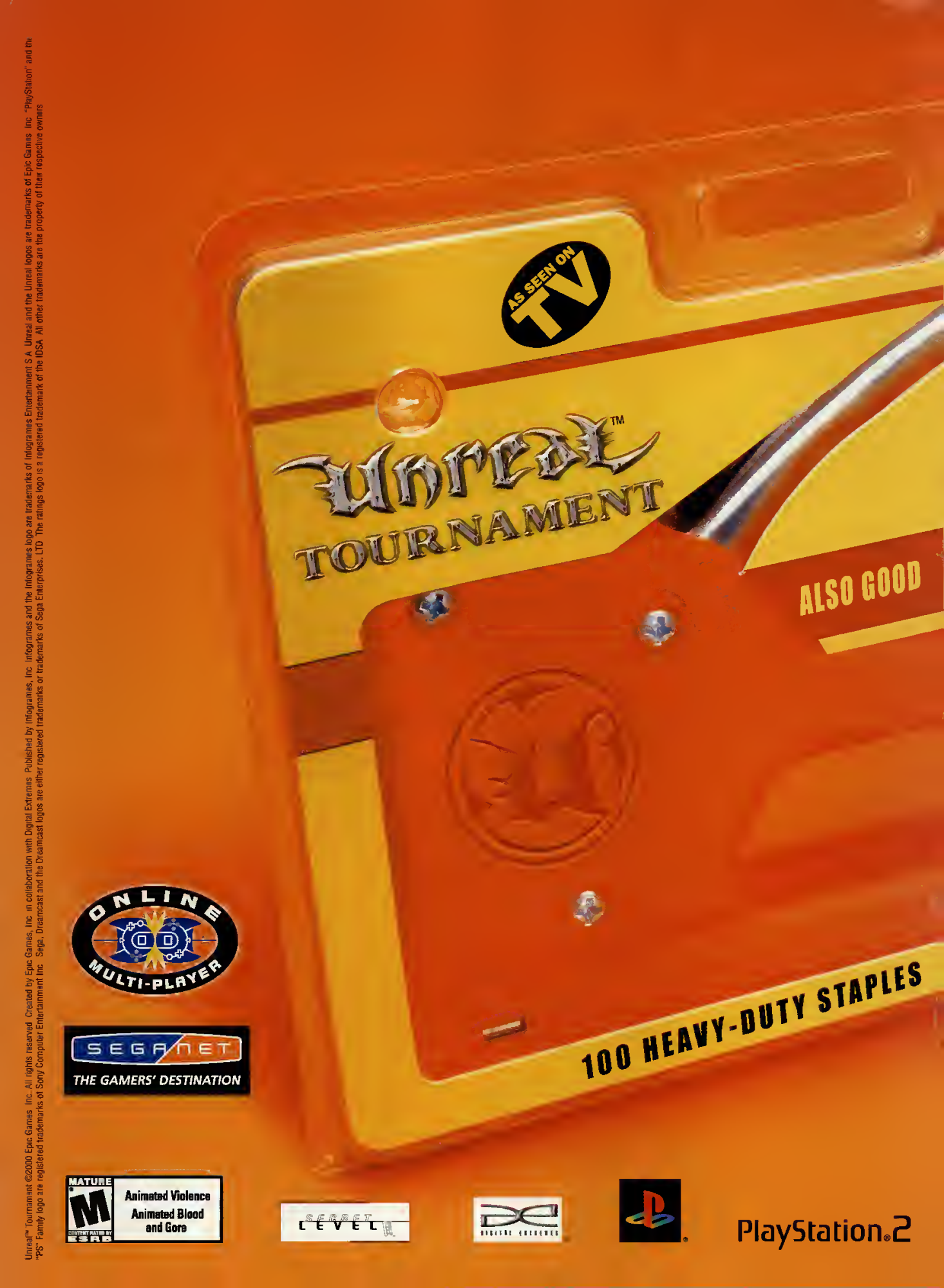
Next Generation (ISSN 1078-9693) is published monthly by Imagine Media, Inc., 150 North Hill Drive, Brisbane, CA 94005. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brisbane CA and additional mailing offices. Newsstand distribution is handled by the Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: One year basic rate (12 issues): US: $20; Canada $34; Foreign: $44. Canadian and foreign orders must be pre-paid, US funds only. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST# R129220688). POSTMASTER: Send address changes to, Next Generation, P.O. Box 53680, Boulder CO 80328-3680. CPC Int'l Pub Mail # D781126. Printed in the United States.



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